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A STUDY OF BLACK TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ACADEMIC
ACHIEVEMENT OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN
RURAL GEORGIA

by

MARSHALL FERNANDO AKER

(Under The Direction of Brenda Marina)

ABSTRACT

Presently, numerous research studies, articles and reports have shown troubling outcomes regarding the education of Black male students in the United States (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010; Prager, 2011). The performance of Black males on national achievement assessments is lower in comparison to the performance of most other subgroups. The high school graduation rate for Black males in the United States is below most other ethnic subgroups (Schotts Foundation, 2015). Although various strategies are often implemented at the national, state, and local level in attempts to address achievement disparities, these efforts have not been fully successful in eliminating the achievement gaps nor improving educational outcomes for Black male students. While dominant explanations for negative educational outcomes seem to blame the Black male students, their motivation, their family and culture (Emdin, 2012; Gira, 2007; Kim & Hargrove, 2013), Critical Race Theory scholars attempt to challenge these deficit explanations and explore alternative perspectives regarding the conditions that may contribute to educational achievement disparities (Jay, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2008). Critical Race Theory insists upon exploring the experiences of people of color who have been historically marginalized and silenced.

Some scholars have noted that black educators often feel left out of discussions and silenced in regards to the teaching and learning of Black students (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1991; White, 2012). Because Black teachers and Black males may share possible cultural connections as well as experiences with marginalization, it is possible that some Black teachers may be able to provide valuable information and counter stories regarding black male achievement (Foster, 1991; Milner, 2006). The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Black teachers regarding the academic achievement of Black male students in elementary schools in rural Georgia. Through the use of focus group interviews, the researcher examined the voices of Black teachers to identify significant factors impacting the educational success of Black males. Findings of this study had implications for the education of Black males in rural elementary schools. Findings were:

- 1) Black male students in rural elementary schools may lack exposure to critical resources needed for their success;
- 2) Policies and practices may limit Black male access to rigorous and advanced curriculum;
- 3) Deficit thinking and stereotypes may confine academic achievement and aspirations for Black male elementary students; and
- 4) Positive and supportive teacher-student relationships may have an important role in improving the educational outcomes for Black males in rural schools.

INDEX WORDS: Black males, Achievement Gap, Teacher perceptions, Student Achievement, Elementary schools, Rural Education, Deficit Perspective, Critical Race Theory, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my father and mother, Lee Roy Aker and Mildred Aker. I cannot put into words how much I love you and miss you. You were my strength, my inspiration, my confidence and my motivation. You poured all that you had into me. You believed in me! You loved me so much! Although you are not with me physically, you are with me still! In fact, you have been with me throughout this journey. Through moments of sadness and hurt, you have uplifted me. In times of confusion and frustration, you have calmed me. Through every trial, disappointment and challenge, you have strengthened and blessed me. I feel your presence now. I feel your support. I feel your pride. I feel your love. As I celebrate achieving this milestone, I do not celebrate alone. I am confident that we celebrate together. As I walk across the graduation stage, we walk together. As I endeavor to move forward with whatever God has planned for me, I know that we move forward together! I am so blessed to have had an amazing mother and father. I am so proud of you! I am grateful to God for you both. You remain the wind beneath my wings!

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First, I give all honor and praise to Jesus Christ for being my savior. I am thankful that Jesus loved me so that he sacrificed all for me. I trust you with all my heart. I thank you for your love, your constant protection, and your presence in my life. “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverb 3: 5-6).

I would like to thank my family for the incredible support that they have given me throughout my life and during this journey. It is amazing how so many family members spoke words into my life to edify me and propel me to greater accomplishments. Your belief in me was consistent even when I doubted myself. I appreciate each of you so much! I am thankful for my brother, Terry, for being my advisor and friend, my aunts for representing my mother and being mother-figures for me, my uncles for being great examples of positive, strong and responsible men, and my cousins for being close to me just like brothers and sisters. I would like to thank my wife, Erica for standing beside me throughout the journey. You showed yourself to be encouraging, loving and supportive even when we endured numerous episodes of intensive studying, prolonged writing and so many nights without sleep! Thank you for your love and believing in me!

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from you all. You are amazing educators! Your voices need to be heard! I encourage you to continue to advocate and uplift the students to which you have been entrusted.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

For decades, federal laws and policies have been enacted in the attempt improve academic achievement for all students throughout the nation (Lohman, 2010; Guisbond, Neill, & Schaeffer, 2012). However, significant challenges persist regarding the academic achievement levels of Black males in schools throughout the United States. Numerous research studies and reports have highlighted disparities in achievement for Black males as compared to other subgroups on national and state educational assessments (Aud, Fox & KewalRamani, 2010; Snyder & Dillow, 2012; Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin-Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). The question of how to eliminate or reduce the “achievement gap” has been a popular area of research (Caldas, Bernier, & Marceau, 2009; Carpenter, Ramirez, & Severn, 2006; Cohen, 2006; Lee, 2002). As a result of the disparities of achievement, society often labels Black males as being in a state of crisis. Multiple reasons are given for the failure of Black males to achieve at levels comparable to other ethnicities. Many scholars have discussed how dominant explanations for the differences in achievement levels are often accusatory towards the Black males, their family and their culture (Edmin, 2012; Gira, 2007; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Teresa Perry discussed how the media and newspapers tend to suggest that cultural attributes of some Black males may be responsible for their lower academic achievement. She wrote:

Furthermore, a review of newspaper articles about the achievement gap reveals that even as some of these articles identify tracking and teacher expectations as possible causes for underachievement, most give greater attention to variables that reside in Black families, students, and communities. The achievement gap is attributed to a peer culture that

doesn't value achievement, and worse, one that associates school achievement with being White. (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003, p. 8)

Some deficient explanations suggest that Blacks may have, or may have adopted, negative behavior patterns that prevent them from responding positively to educational interventions and environmental changes (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, Garrison-Wade, 2008). Black males are often seen as lacking the intellectual capacity to be successful in academic settings (Hodges, Burden, Robinson, Bennett III, 2008).

In spite of the prevalence of negative explanations, some educators and scholars (hooks, 2004, Noguera, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Perry et al., 2003) insist that alternative perspectives must be considered regarding Black male achievement. These scholars have advocated for consideration of counter stories to the dominant narratives that are prevalent. Counter narratives may provide critical insights into the disparities that exist and the various conditions that impact the academic achievement of Black males. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2007) asserted that it is misleading to focus attention on the perceived "achievement gap" when there are many factors that actively contribute to the challenges that impact academic achievement for Blacks. Ladson-Billings identified several less-mentioned gaps that stifle or constrain educational opportunities for Black students. Accordingly, she emphasized the need for a comprehensive analysis of the factors and conditions impacting the achievement of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Likewise, Jordan and Cooper (2002) discussed how popular conceptions of the achievement gap do not address social, structural and institutional impediments that hinder students of color. They stated:

Many Black males face daunting challenges in school just as they are at risk in the larger spheres of society. It is due, in part, to historical and ongoing inequality in society and institutionalized racism. The criminalization of Black males, such as racial profiling, disparaging media images as challenged by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the overrepresentation of Black males in state and federal prisons, is inextricably linked to educational at-risk conditions.” (Jordan & Cooper, 2002, p. 12)

Because stereotypes and discrimination are present in society, many educators have asserted that these conditions are also present in schools. Some teachers may harbor negative perceptions and stereotypes regarding Black males. Their expectations for Black males may be lower than their expectations for other groups of students. Milner (2007) described how teachers often embrace and accept the negative images that society has cast upon Black males. Accordingly, teachers may often project these negative stereotypes onto their Black male students. He wrote:

Entrenched in some teachers’ thinking (often subconsciously) are stereotypes and misconceptions about Black males that prevent teachers from providing the best learning opportunities for students. In short, if teachers believe Black males are destined for failure and apathy, their pedagogies will be saturated with low expectations; teachers will be unwilling to prepare for their courses and unwilling to provide Black male students in urban schools with the best. In essence, teachers often think about Black male students through deficit lenses. (Milner, 2007, p. 244)

Some researchers have suggested that Black males can perceive when the educators have negative perceptions or expectations for them. As a result of perceiving this, Black males are

more likely to disengage from school (Berry, 2013; Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). Pedro Noguera also discussed how schools engage in practices that convey hidden messages to students. He wrote:

As schools sort children by perceived measures of their ability and as they single out certain children for discipline, implicit and explicit messages about racial and gender identities are conveyed. To the degree that White or Asian children are disproportionately placed in gifted and honors classes, the idea that such children are inherently smarter may be inadvertently reinforced. Similarly, when African American and Latino children are overrepresented in remedial classes, special education programs, or on the lists for suspension or expulsion, the idea that these children are not as smart or as well behaved is also reinforced. (Noguera, 2003, p. 445)

As the debate continues regarding improving academic achievement for Black males, educational scholars and practitioners are often consulted and tasked with offering answers and solutions. However as Lisa Delpit (1995) has indicated, issues of power and whose voice is heard in determining what best for children of color are major educational dilemmas. Some scholars have noted that black educators face marginalization in educational institutions. Black educators may be treated as outsiders within their work environments. These educators may encounter tension as they work with and communicate with their professional colleagues in regards to instructional practices and students of color. Black teachers may face pressure to speak or act in ways to meet the cultural codes that may be present in their workplace (Hinton, 2010). In regards to issues of race and racism, Black educators may feel pressure to be neutral and dismiss their personal worldviews that are in opposition to dominate society (Kraehe, 2015). They may feel left out of discussions and silenced in regards to the teaching and learning of

Black students (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1991; Milner, 2006; White, 2012). Lisa Delpit (1995) discussed the importance of identifying and giving voice to educators with alternative worldviews. She wrote:

Teachers are in an ideal position to play this role, to attempt to get all of the issues on the table in order to initiate true dialogue. This can only be done, however, by seeking out those whose perspectives may differ most, by learning to give their words complete attention, by understanding one's own power, even if that power stems merely from being in the majority, by being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of color, and to listen, no, to hear what they say. (Delpit, p. 47)

Purpose Statement and Rationale

School leaders have a responsibility to implement effective strategies to improve the academic achievement of Black males. Gloria Ladson-Billings wrote:

If we are serious about solving these problems in schools and classrooms, we have to be serious about intense study and careful rethinking of race and education. Adopting and adapting CRT (Critical Race Theory) as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education and propose radical solutions for addressing it. (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 27)

Accordingly, Whiting stated, "Educational advocacy involves consultation activities by educators to help colleagues to better understand the dynamics of male development from a Black male perspective and make the teaching and learning process more relevant to Black male realities" (Whiting, 2009, p. 231). Although many research studies and reports attempt to provide guidance in addressing the academic problems of Black males (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, Casserly, 2010; Prager, 2011; Schotts Foundation, 2015), less research is available which

explores the perspectives of Black educators who are viewed as being highly effective in improving learning outcomes for Black male students. Given that Black teachers may share cultural connections with Black males and may have experienced various levels of marginalization in schools and society similar to their Black male students, these teachers may be able to offer valuable information to other educators regarding Black male achievement (Foster, 1991; Milner, 2006). These teachers' perspectives may provide new insight of the challenges regarding Black male achievement. Black teachers not only work with Black male students intimately on a day to day basis, but because they also work closely with non-Black teachers, they are familiar with how Black male students and non-Black teachers interact. Black teachers' experiences, perceptions and thoughts regarding Black male achievement may provide school administrators and educational leaders with critical knowledge that can be beneficial in their efforts to the initiate procedures, strategies, and programs to improve the academic achievement of Black males. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine Black teachers' perceptions of the academic achievement of Black male students in elementary schools in rural Georgia.

Research Questions

Research that explores the experiences, instructional practices and pedagogy of highly effective Black teachers may provide meaningful information to support all educators that work with Black male students. Therefore, this study's primary research question was: What are the perceptions of Black teachers on the academic achievement of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia. Through conducting this study, the researcher sought to explore this primary question with the following sub-questions. 1) What impact do Black teachers perceive attending elementary school in a rural environment have on the academic achievement of Black

males? 2) What impact do Black teachers perceive school curriculum, policies and practices have on the academic achievement of Black males? 3) What impact do Black teachers perceive teacher demographics have on the academic achievement of Black males? 4) What interventions, strategies, and messages do Black teachers think are effective in improving academic achievement of Black males?

Significance

This study is derived from the belief that the quality of life that Black males are able to attain is directly related to their ability to be academically successful in early childhood education (Aratani, Wight, & Cooper, 2011). Presently, educational and social statistics offer a pessimistic view of the future for young Black males. In Georgia, only about 55% of Black males graduated from high school in 2013 (Schotts Foundation, 2015). This study is also significant because Georgia has the third largest rural enrollment of students in the nation. There are unique educational challenges and opportunities that are present in rural schools (Sampson, 2005; Sarrío, 2012). Among the challenges that have been discussed, student poverty, school personnel demographics, availability of educational resources, and school proximity to students' homes have been identified. Minority students in Georgia comprise 37% of the students attending rural schools. A report from the Rural School and Community Trust indicated that rural students in Georgia have performed lower compared to other populations on the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014). Given that Georgia ranks fortieth in the nation in the graduation rate for its Black males and a significant percentage of minority students attend rural schools, this study may generate meaningful information to assist educators in improving educational outcomes for Black male students in rural communities. Some scholars have suggested that the quality of education that

Black males receive in elementary schools has a tremendous impact on their future success in schools and in life (Baggerly & Parker, 2005; Harper & Davis, 2012; Hilgendorf, 2012; Kunjufu, 2013). Accordingly, this study attempted to gain critical knowledge by soliciting the personal stories and perspectives of Black teachers. By soliciting the voices of Black teachers, the researcher hoped to identify the factors that the teachers perceived as impacting the achievement of Black males in rural Georgia. With the knowledge that was gained from this study, teachers, parents, and administrators may become better prepared and equipped to positively impact the lives of young Black male students. Teachers may become aware of specific challenges that Black male students may face in school and society. In addition, the teachers may learn strategies and techniques that will enable them to productively engage with students and motivate them toward higher achievement. Also, this study may provide parents with valuable insights on the educational challenges that their Black sons face in school. These parents may learn effective methods to communicate with school personnel to improve their child's opportunity for success within school and other public environments. Administrators may gain critical knowledge of instructional practices that are highly effective with Black male students. Also, the administrators may become aware of possible professional learning needs to support their staff in improving the achievement of Black males. As these various stakeholders embrace the knowledge gained from this study, they may become more attuned to improving the life chances of their Black male students. As Noguera (2003) stated,

changing the culture and structure of schools such that African American male students come to regard them as sources of support for their aspirations and identities will undoubtedly be the most important step that can be taken to make high levels of academic achievement the norm rather than the exception. (p. 455)

Research Design

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory highlights how the life experiences of people of color are distorted and oppressed through power relations maintained by dominant order (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). One key component of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is its assertion that racism is endemic in the United States. CRT posits that racial oppression is normal and intertwined naturally within the social structures of society (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). CRT is concerned with the relationships between marginalized groups and dominant society. Researchers of CRT attempt to give voice to the marginalized, expose injustices, and affect positive change (Henfield, Moore, Wood, 2008). Based upon current educational trends and achievement results, some scholars assert that Black male students are in need of authentic support as they navigate through the many challenges that they face in schools. Noguera stated:

For those who seek to help Black students and males in particular, the challenge is to find ways to support their resistance to negative stereotypes and school sorting practices and to make choosing failure a less likely option for them. (Noguera, 2003, p. 33)

Critical Race Theory asserts that race is a central structure in our society. Racial inequities and inequalities in education are manifestations of the permanence of racism in the larger society. Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman (2011) stated, “CRT in education highlights those aspects of society, institutions, schools and classrooms that tell the story of the functions, meanings, causes, and consequences of racial educational inequality” (p.3). Critical race theorists suggest that dominant perspectives regarding the achievement of Black males have been negatively slanted in casting blame on students, parents, or culture and communities. Very little attention has been given to perspectives and thoughts that are in opposition to the dominant ideology of deficiency.

According to this deficit paradigm, the academic underachievement is the result of inadequacies in Black students, their families and their environments. It is an ideology that contributes to notions of Black inferiority. This way of thinking permeates into schools with teachers, administrators, and curriculum (Douglas et al., 2008). Consequently, CRT scholars have expressed a frustration with traditional methodology. For CRT theorists, educational research often functions to support and maintain stereotypical perceptions of Black males. In addition, CRT asserts that much of the recommendations coming from traditional research purports that Black male achievement could be improved as Black males assimilate into mainstream culture and move away from traditional manifestations of Black culture. Critical race theory's emphasis on creating a context where the voices of those who have been silenced can be heard and respected is extremely valuable. As stated in Zamudio et al. (2011), "For CRT scholars, the focus rests on who is telling which stories in what way, from what theoretical lens are they being explained, and what purpose are they being told (p. 117)." A major contribution of CRT is its insistence on counter narratives or counter stories. Through these counter narratives or stories, thick and rich descriptions of the experiences, perspectives, and challenges of the people most directly affected are brought to light. The purpose of CRT research is to allow these counter stories to serve as a catalyst to promote social justice (Zamudio et al, 2011). It is the researcher's belief that valuable insights into the academic achievement of Black males can be gained by examining the perceptions, experiences, and stories of Black teachers in elementary schools. Utilizing the theoretical lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this qualitative study attempts to explore the experiences and perceptions of Black teachers regarding the academic achievement of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia.

Population and Sample

Rural schools in Georgia face a variety of challenges in improving educational outcomes for all students, especially Black males (Sarrío, 2012). Given that the researcher is a Black male K-12 educator who grew up and eventually began his teaching and administrative career in rural Georgia, he has been very interested and concerned with the quality of education that Black males receive in rural settings. Scholars contend that the educational experiences of Black students are greatly impacted by the culture of the schools in which the students attend and the perspectives of those educators charged with teaching them. Based upon these factors, Black male students may experience very different levels of success or failure (Kunjufu, 2013). Because of cultural connections and their experiences with marginalization, Black teachers may be able to offer valuable information and counter stories regarding Black male achievement (Foster, 1991; Milner, 2006). In the effort to gain greater insight into the challenges that Black males may encounter in elementary schools in rural Georgia, the researcher desired to solicit the voices of Black teachers that were viewed as being successful with Black males students based on two criteria: 1) High academic achievement of Black males in the teacher's class on standardized assessments; 2) The teacher's ability to demonstrate care and develop positive relations with his or her Black male students. Accordingly, the population for this study was limited to Black teachers who met the above criteria working at three elementary schools in rural middle Georgia.

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving IRB approval and district approval, the researcher contacted the principals of three rural elementary schools in middle Georgia regarding the research project. The principals were informed of the purpose of study. The researcher asked each principal to provide a list of all teachers in their school who were successful with Black male students based

on two criteria: 1) High academic achievement of Black males in the teacher's classroom on standardized summative assessments; 2) The teacher's ability to demonstrate care and develop positive relations with his or her Black male students. After the principals provided the list of teachers for his or her respective school, the researcher contacted the potential participants by email. Each potential participant received introduction letter from the researcher that communicated the purpose of the study. The letter informed potential participants that their involvement in the study was strictly voluntary. The potential participants were also informed of the steps that the researcher would take to protect their confidentiality.

- 1) Access to digital audio files will be password protected with a secure passcode.
- 2) Pseudonyms will be assigned for each participant in the study as well their schools.
- 3) Digital recording device (iPad) will be kept locked in secure file cabinet in the researcher's home.
- 4) Focus discussion transcriptions secured on researcher's personal computer with password protection to prevent unauthorized users.
- 5) Audio files, notes and transcriptions will be destroyed after three years.

The letter asked those teachers who self-identified as being Black to participate in the study. The participants were asked to commit to a focus group discussion that may last between 90 to 120 minutes. As teachers indicated their willingness to participate in the study, the researcher scheduled the focus group discussions at times that were convenient for the participants of each school. A focus group was scheduled at each school. Two sessions were scheduled at Appleton Elementary (Pseudonym) out of convenience to the participants. Several days prior to the focus group discussion, the participants were sent a Participant Profile document that allowed each participant to share his or her biographical and educational information with the researcher. This

also allowed participants to share aspects of their educational philosophy and beliefs regarding Black males that may not have been captured during the focus discussions. As a result, the participants and the researcher were able to maximize the value of the focus group discussion time by exploring the participants' perceptions, experiences and stories. As the focus group discussion occurred, the researcher collected notes to capture significant moments and points of emphasis. Additional questions were asked when appropriate to clarify understanding as needed.

Data Analysis

The researcher began the data analysis through a process of familiarizing himself with all the data gathered in the study. This familiarization process involved listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts multiple times. Dilshad & Latif (2013) advocated examining for big ideas, considering words and context of use, and examining the strength of participants' feelings. The analysis of the data from the focus group discussions involved many steps. After using a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006), the researcher used constant comparison as an analytical technique to analyze the data collected from the focus groups. Constant comparison was first used in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) but was also used in focus group data (Doody, Slevin, Taggart, 2013). Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) discussed that there are three major stages which characterize constant comparison analysis. Open coding is used in the first stage. This entails the process to break down the data into smaller units. Consequently, the researcher wrote memos in the margins of the text in the form of short phrases, ideas, or concepts that arise from the text (Doody et al., 2013). The researcher identified distinct concepts. The researcher attached a descriptor or code to each unit. Axial coding is the second stage. During this stage, the initial codes are grouped into categories. For this study, special attention was given to capturing each participant's voice through notating significant quotes or

experiences. The final stage is selective coding. During this stage, the researcher sought to develop one or more theme that expressed the content of each group. Subsequently, the researcher compared the statements, experiences, and perceptions of all the participants to identify and highlight any common themes that emerged from all of the participants. Doody and colleagues (2013) indicated that constant comparison is beneficial when there are several focus groups within the same study. They indicated that focus group data are analyzed one group at a time enabling the researcher to use the multiple groups to compare the themes that emerged from the various groups. This process assists the researcher in reaching data saturation (Doody et al., 2013; Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, Zoran, 2009). From interpreting the collective themes that emerged from all the participants, the researcher obtained the findings to address the primary research question and sub questions. Their collective stories and experiences may be very insightful to educators and other stakeholders seeking to develop greater understanding of Black male achievement.

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

It is assumed that the sample of teachers participating in this study is representative of a larger population of Black educators in rural Georgia. It is assumed that all participants will be truthful. It is also assumed that focus group interviews are appropriate for collecting the perceptions of the participants.

The study is limited due the number of Black participants available within the schools and willing to participate. Another limit in this study is the teacher's time available to gather the perspectives of the participants.

A delimitation of this study is the use of Critical Race Theory as the theoretical framework. Critical Race Theory (CRT) explores how the life experiences of people of color are

distorted and oppressed through power relations maintained by dominant order (Gall et al., 2007). A delimitation of this study is the focus on teachers in the elementary schools. The researcher contends that Black male students formulate much of their values and beliefs regarding education at the elementary level. Additionally, this study was delimited to specifically target Black teachers who are considered successful with Black males. This study was purposely designed to gather the stories and counter stories of Black teachers because of the possible racial and cultural similarities with their students.

Definition of Terms

Assessment – A measurement of a student’s specific knowledge or skill that may be performance, oral, or written.

Assimilation – Process of taking on social and cultural traits of the majority race in the nation in which one lives.

Class – Group of individuals who share a similar socioeconomic status.

Colorblindness – Belief that one should treat all persons equally, without regard to their race.

Counter storytelling – Writing that aim to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority.

Cultural Codes - Symbols and systems of meaning that are relevant to members of a particular culture or subculture.

Critical Race Theory - Radical legal movement that seeks to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power.

Discrimination – Practice of treating similarly situated individual differently because of race, gender, sexual orientation, appearance, or national origin.

Diversity – Policy founded on the belief that individuals of different races and ethnicities can contribute workplaces, schools, and other setting.

Educational Accountability – The implementation of standards-based testing and school discipline (as a means) to sort and stratify students in the name of school reform (Howard, 2008)

Ethnicity – Group characteristic often based on national origin, ancestry, language, or other cultural characteristic.

Hegemony – Domination by the ruling class and unconscious acceptance of that state of affairs by the subordinate group.

Identity – That by which one defines oneself.

Ideology – Set of strongly held beliefs or values, especially dealing with governance of society.

Interest convergence – Theory which the dominant group will only tolerate racial justice when it suits their interest.

Merit – individual worthiness; critical race scholars question the view that people may be ranked by merit and that distribution of benefits is rational and just.

Privilege – Right or advantage, often unwritten, conferred on some but not others.

Racism – Any program or practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment based on membership in a race or ethnic group.

Segregation – Separation of individuals or groups by race.

Stereotype – a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Stereotype threat – a situational threat-a threat in the air-that, in general form, can affect the members of any group about who a negative stereotype exists.

Voice – Ability of a group, such as African Americans or women, to articulate experience in ways unique to it.

Summary

School administrators are often charged with leading the process to bring about meaningful change in the achievement of all students. Yet, these school leaders have to devote time to overseeing multiple areas within their given schools. However, it is the teachers that are on the front line with the students every day. The teachers are the ones that are charged with delivering the essential instruction that is needed for the success of all students in their classrooms. Research indicates that Black male academic achievement is far below the achievement levels of others ethnic groups. Black teachers may possess valuable knowledge that could be critical in improving the academic achievement of Black students. Through illuminating the experiences, perceptions and stories of Black teachers, the researcher hopes to generate greater understanding of the depth and breadth of the issues surrounding Black male achievement. DeCuir & Dixson (2004) stated “Given the insidious and often subtle way in which race and racism operate, it is imperative that educational researchers explore the role of race when examining the educational experiences of Black students.” The academic achievement of Black males is not a simple issue. It is complex with multiple layers. Through the counter stories of Black teachers, readers may find some clarity to the conditions that impact their achievement and insight that will lead to meaningful strategies for improvement.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Education is widely considered as the foundation and most significant factor to enhance the quality of life for individuals. The perception of education having transformative power for people is widespread. In the United States, quality education has been viewed as the critical ingredient for individuals to obtain access to the great opportunities that are available within the country. For most citizens in the United States, schools are thought to serve as bridges to opportunity, allowing all individuals to share in the nation's promises of prosperity and individual freedom (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Through the attainment of appropriate education, it is the common belief in our society that any individual can be equipped with the necessary tools to overcome his or her own personal circumstances - no matter the social, economic, or political conditions in which he or she may have been born. Throughout history, many influential leaders have discussed the merits, benefits, and power of education. In recent times, President Obama also expressed how education would be the catalyst to our nation's continued prosperity. President Barack Obama stated, "If we want America to lead in the 21st century, nothing is more important than giving everyone the best education possible — from the day they start preschool to the day they start their career" (Obama, 2012, para. 6).

In spite of the prevalent belief in the power of education to enhance the lives of students, our nation has yet to see all of its students obtain comparable success in academic achievement and educational attainment. If education is actually an equalizer of conditions and bridge to greater opportunities, why are there schools throughout the nation that are struggling and being unsuccessful in eliminating the educational achievement disparities for Black males? Research is

plentiful regarding negative educational outcomes for Black male students in the United States (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Lewis et al., 2010; Prager, 2011). According to the Schott's Foundation (2015), the graduation rate for Black males in the United States was about 59% in 2013. However, the percentage of Black males graduating high school in the state of Georgia in 2013 was even lower, around 55 percent. Georgia ranks fortieth in the nation in regards to the graduation rate for Black males (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014; Schott's Foundation, 2015). Within the state of Georgia, rural school environments present additional educational challenges for students (Sampson, 2005; Sarrio, 2012). From illuminating the perspectives of Black teachers, this study sought to explore the academic achievement of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia. Therefore, this section of the literature review will first present characteristics of rural education in Georgia. Afterwards, early and elementary education for Black males will be discussed. Finally the review will identify some of the statistics regarding educational attainment and academic achievement for Black males.

Rural Education

Georgia has almost 600,000 students attend rural schools, which is the third most rural students in the nation behind Texas and North Carolina (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014). Some scholars have discussed the unique educational benefits and as well as challenges related to rural education. Alice Sampson (2005) indicated that many rural schools in Georgia reflect the positive values and standards of their communities such as strong work ethic, concern for neighbors, and low crime rates. She discussed that collaborative partnerships often exist in rural districts between the school, community, families, and students. In addition, Sampson (2005) indicated that many rural students benefit from attending rural schools because of the connectedness, intimacy and safety of the schools. She expressed that rural schools may be very

effective in teaching students how become productive citizens and how to become actively engaged in their community and nation. Also, students in rural schools may benefit from the environmental quality of rural settings as compared to urban areas. Hardre, Sullivan, and Roberts (2008) discussed that a distinctive positive attribute of rural schools is the emphasis on caring that is present in the rural environments. However, they also asserted that rural students may lack exposure to relevant employment options due to limited industries and businesses in the community.

Usually in rural communities, there are very few businesses and industries that comprise the tax base. Given that schools are funded partially through taxes, rural school systems may have limited financial resources to support the schools' educational programs (Sampson, 2005). Often school systems in rural communities are greatly challenged in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers in their schools (Powell, Higgins, Aram, Freed, 2009). Rural communities may have little to offer in regards to housing options and family entertainment options for prospective teachers. Also, because of financial constraints and geographical distance from other districts, rural school systems may not be able to provide comparable teacher training and development programs. As a result, many rural schools lack diversity in their faculty and staff. Rural schools generally have a smaller percentage of minority teachers compared to all other locales (Sarrío, 2012).

The location of schools in rural communities may present additional challenges for teachers, students, and parents. Many of the students who attend rural schools in Georgia may live long distances from the school. Therefore, students may have to endure long bus rides to and from school on a daily basis. Sometimes the physical distance between schools and students' homes may impact parents' ability to engage with and communicate with the educators within

the school. Another challenge is the scarcity of educational resources in rural school systems. The lack of resources and supports can have significant implications on the academic achievement of students in rural schools. Rural school districts may spend much less per student than other locations. Because of various limitations, rural schools may not be able to provide students with a variety of innovative educational programs and academic courses. As a result, many rural students may have limited exposure and less access to rigorous classes and programs designed to strengthen their academic skills. Compared to suburban school districts, fewer students in rural schools take Advanced Placements exams. Thus, rural students are more likely to score lower on college entrance exams and need remedial support in college (Sarrío, 2012).

National statistics indicate that rural Georgia students score near the bottom in the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments. The college enrollment rate for students 18 to 24 was generally lower in rural areas. Although there are definite educational challenges for many students attending rural schools, some have suggested that these challenges are intensified for Black students. Morris and Monroe (2009) discussed that race and the geographical location of schools often intersect to shape the contemporary experiences for Black students. In 2004, a larger percentage of Black students attending public schools in remote rural areas were impoverished (Provasnik, KewalRamani, Coleman, Gillbertson, Herring & Xie, 2007). Likewise, Levernier and White (1998) discussed that within the rural region of Georgia known as the “Plantation Belt” or “Black Belt”, race was the most important indicator of poverty in the South. He noted that family poverty in this area of Georgia was substantially higher than the poverty rate for other regions of the state. Hodges and MacTavish (2009) discussed how this middle Georgia region, which has a high Black population, is often ignored in spite of high drop-out rates and teacher attrition rates. Kusimo

(1999) discussed that in many rural communities, Black parents have limited influence in decisions affecting their children. Black parents have little recourse to challenge the curriculum choices, instructional strategies, or course placement decisions.

Early and Elementary Education for Black Students

For all children, early childhood development and education has a tremendous impact on their future academic achievement (Aratani, Wight, & Cooper, 2011). However, some scholars have asserted that cognitive gaps are present with some Black children as early as nine months of age. Poverty is cited as exacerbating the educational challenges that young Black children face (Prager, 2011). Aratani, Wight and Cooper (2011) indicated that Black boys were particular vulnerable in socio-emotional development, which is important for early academic performance. Fryer and Levitt (2002) suggest that when Black children enter kindergarten academic deficiencies are not apparent. However over the first two years of school, Black students lose academic ground relative to their position to Whites. These scholars contribute part of the disparity to the quality of schools that the students attend. They also identify social-economic status and the effects of poverty as underlying factors in racial differences in achievement. They indicated that the Black children in the sample may not have had comparable educational support systems as compared to other subgroups. They also mentioned that rural Black students perform worse than those in central cities. Similarly, Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, and Chen (2012) conducted a study to provide a comprehensive account of how various risks encountered by third grade Black male students negatively impacted their Reading and Math achievement. They examined the students' risks from birth to third grade including inadequate prenatal care, lead exposure, low maternal education, low birthweight, homelessness, and maltreatment. These researchers indicated that the level of risks experienced by the Black males far exceeded the

level of risks experienced by White males. They suggested that there was a correlation between level of risks Black males experienced and the academic achievement gap between the Black and White males. They stated that the negative academic outcomes that Black males experience as a result of the risk factors could be mitigated through evidenced based interventions that promote school attendance and academic engagement. Subsequently, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010-11 collected information about the early educational experiences of a nationally representative sample of children who were in kindergarten in the year 2010-2011. An analysis of the Reading, Math, and Science performance data in the spring of second grade found that Black students scored below White students (Mulligan, McCarroll, Flanagan, & Potter, 2015). Only about 12 percent of Black boys were proficient in reading in the fourth grade compared to 38 percent of White boys. According to Aratani, Wight, and Cooper (2011), this Reading gap remains at the eighth grade. In addition, a similar gap is present for Black boys in math achievement. Kusimo (1999) indicated that when Black students encounter initial difficulties in early schooling, a pattern may emerge in which the students are evaluated as “low ability” and placed in low track remedial or special education programs. Because of the many challenges that young Black boys face in early education, some researchers have advocated for various interventions to improve their academic achievement (Baggerly & Parker, 2005; West, 1997).

Achievement Disparities

Although state and local school districts are implementing various interventions and reforms as a result of national emphasis on achievement, the academic performance of Black males continues to be of significant concern. Across almost every educational and socio-economic category, statistics paint an ominous future for Black males. On National Assessment

of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments, Black male academic achievement is lower than other subgroups in most core subjects (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Barton & Conley, 2009; Ross, Kena, Rathbun, KewalRamani, Zhang, Kristapovich, & Manning, 2012). Black males frequently comprise the highest percentage of students that are retained in kindergarten through eighth among all subgroups (Lewis et al., 2010). In 2009, Black males comprised 29 percent of the students that were retained in ninth grade. Also, in 2012-2013 Black males' Average Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) was the lowest among all subgroups at 57 percent while White males had 79 percent (Ross et al., 2012). Similarly in 2013, the Schott Foundation reported that 59 percent of Black males graduated from high school in the United States in cohort compared to 80 percent of Whites males. In 2009, the average SAT scores of Black males were lower than White males in reading, writing, and mathematics. The average ACT score for Black males was lower than White males in 2009. Black males were less likely to enroll in two-year or four-year colleges after high school graduation (Lewis et al, 2010).

Access to Rigorous Curriculum

As increasing attention has been directed at academic achievement disparities among ethnicities, many in the general public, as well as educators and researchers, have sought explanations regarding the causes and conditions that are responsible for the academic achievement gaps. Barton and Coley (2009) discussed that particular life experiences and conditions have significant correlations to student achievement and cognitive development. In their report, *Parsing the Achievement Gap II*, Barton and Coley clustered the factors into three categories: school related factors, home-related factors, and non-school factors. Under school factors, the level of rigor in the curriculum was identified as a correlate to student achievement. According the Barton and Coley (2009) Black students did not have as much participation in

rigorous curriculum as White students. Instead, the researchers indicated Black students tended to be more likely to take mid-level courses and less likely to take advanced courses. Ross and colleagues (2012) highlighted how Black students experience change as they matriculate from lower grades to upper grades. They noted that among the Black students who scored in the top half of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of 2004, only 20 percent of these students enrolled in algebra or advanced mathematics when they were in the eighth grade in 2007. A consequence of the lack of exposure to advance curriculum may be that Black students become less prepared for the more rigorous courses that may be required in colleges and universities. In addition, taking rigorous courses in high school enhances students' postsecondary options. Aud, Fox, and KewalRamani (2010) discussed that from 1999 – 2008, although Black and Hispanic enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) increased, Black students scored lower compared to other subgroups. Students who are successful in AP courses may have the opportunity to earn college credit. Therefore, access to advanced and rigorous curriculum at lower grade levels may be critical to preparing students for greater academic success in high school and beyond.

Access to Effective Teachers

Some researchers have raised concerns that disadvantaged students may not have equitable access to effective teachers. Therefore, the academic achievement of the disadvantaged students suffers in comparison to other groups of students that have greater access to effective teachers. In a report entitled *Access to Effective Teaching for Disadvantaged Students*, researchers studied effective teaching in 29 school districts over the 2008-2009 to 2010-2011 school years. The researchers found that:

On average, disadvantaged students had less access to effective teaching in the 29 study districts in grades 4 through 8. The magnitude of differences in effective teaching for

disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in a given year was equivalent to a shift of two percentile points in the student achievement gap. (Isenberg, Max, Gleason, Potamites, Santillano, Hock, & Hansen, 2013)

These researchers also found that access to effective teaching for these students did not change over time. Although access to effective teaching varied across school districts, unequal access was most related to the school assignment of teachers (Isenberg et al., 2013). Also, Barton and Coley denoted that teacher preparation, experience, attendance, and turnover were significant factors in academic performance. Their research concluded that minority students were more likely to have inexperienced teachers. In addition, minority and low socioeconomic students were more likely to be taught by teachers that were not certified in math. Aud, Fox, and KewalRamani (2010) showed that in 2007-2008, 25 percent of secondary math teachers who taught in schools with at least 50 percent Black enrollment had neither a certification nor a college major in Mathematics. Comparatively in schools with at least 50 percent White enrollment, only eight percent of Mathematics teachers did not have certification or a college major.

Access to Additional Resources

According Barton and Coley (2009) class size, availability of instructional technology, and school safety impact academic achievement. Minority students were more likely to be instructed in classes that had a greater number of students. Minority students often have less access to technology. Also, minority students are more likely to have safety concerns at school. Barton and Coley (2009) also identified home factors that influence student achievement. White parents were more likely to be involved and volunteer at the school than minority parents. Barton and Coley (2009) suggested that student achievement was impacted by factors “before and

beyond the school.” According to these researchers, minority students were negatively impacted by more frequent changes in the schools, nutrition and hunger, and lack of exposure to early learning and educational resources. Similarly, Barton and Conley (2009) indicated that minority students were less likely to be exposed to early reading and were more likely to watch television for longer periods of time. Many studies indicate that student achievement is adversely affected by the level of poverty that students live in. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds do not perform as well as other students with moderate to affluent backgrounds (Lee, 2002; Spielhagan, 2006).

Impact of Achievement Disparities

The disparities of academic achievement are significant because of the devastating impact that may occur to thousands of Black male students, their community and the economy. The National Center for Educational Statistics found that adults who have difficulty reading are much more likely to live in poverty, be on food stamps, and less likely to have fulltime employment (Kirsh, Jugeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 2002). A 2009 report by McKinsey & Company also indicated that educational achievement gaps in the United States can be extremely costly in regards to underutilization of human potential. The report indicated that individuals who have had poor academic achievement may have lower earnings, poorer health, and higher rates of incarceration. According this 2009 report, achievement gaps create large deficits between actual and potential output in the economy. For example, the report postulates that if the achievement gap between Black and Latino students had been narrowed similar to other nations, the United States Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would have been \$310 billion to \$525 billion higher. The report stated, “. . .the persistence of these educational achievement gaps imposes on

the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession” (McKinsey & Company, 2009, p. 6).

Disparities in Policies and Practices

While much attention has been given to achievement gaps that indicate that Black students’ performance on standardized tests is below the performance of other subgroups, less attention is given how institutional policies and practices that are supposedly fair in form have had a disproportionately negative impact on minorities. Lewis and colleagues (2010) indicated that Black males are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers. Along with Hispanic males, Black males constituted about 80 percent of the students in special education. Black males are 2.5 percent less likely to be enrolled in gifted or talented programs even when they have a history of above average academic achievement. Barton and Conley (2009) discussed that to see meaningful gains in student achievement, it is necessary to examine education and public policy, as well as those factors that impact learning and achievement beyond the school. They wrote:

The achievement gap has deep roots—deep in out-of-school experiences and deep in the structures of schools. Inequality is like an unwanted guest who comes early in these children’s lives and stays late. Policies and practices that are likely to narrow gaps in achievement need to be broad and comprehensive if they are to check inequality at outset of a child’s academic career and create conditions in which every child can flower, achieve, and attain in school and in life. (Barton & Conley, 2009, p. 33)

Countless explanations exist regarding the causes and conditions that result in lower achievement for Black males. Research is plentiful regarding achievement gaps, cultural deficit theories, and structural impediments that impact Black males. Using Critical Race Theory as the framework,

the primary purpose of the subsequent section of this review is to present alternative perspectives on the conditions responsible for educational achievement disparities of Black males.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory emerged from several scholars and activists that were passionate about studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado, Stefancic, 2012). Critical Race Theory was established in the mid-1970s as a response to the shortcoming of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) to address the effects of race and racism in law. Scholars were concerned about the slow pace of racial reform in the United States as well as the emergence of conservative policies (Howard, 2008). Legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado are among the scholars that are considered as some of the originators of Critical Race Theory (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). Eventually, Critical Race Theory evolved to address multiple disciplines including education. Critical Race Theory is distinct in that it not only seeks to analyze the conditions that impact People of Color, it attempts to advocate for positive changes to improve the life chances for People of Color in the country. In the next sections, this review will discuss some of the tenets of Critical Race Theory that serve as its foundation.

Racism, Meritocracy, & Colorblindness

The primary tenet of Critical Race Theory is the assertion that racism is engrained in all aspects of American society. Racism has been discussed and described in many different ways. For Critical Race Theorists, there is usually some emphasis placed on power and domination. Tara Yosso (2006) defined racism as:

- (1) a false belief in White supremacy that handicaps society, (2) a system that upholds Whites as superior to all other groups, and (3) the structural subordination of multiple

racial and ethnic groups. With its macro, micro, interpersonal, institutional, overt, and subtle forms, racism entails institutional power. *Communities of Color in the United States* have never possessed this form of power. (p.5)

Yosso indicated that racism results in the oppression of People of Color and the privileging of Whites. Other Critical Race scholars have discussed the concept of White Privilege that is facilitated and perpetuating through systemic and institutionalized racism. As Decuir & Dixon (2004) wrote:

Furthermore, the notion of the permanence of racism suggests that racist hierarchical structures govern all political, economic, and social domains. Such structures allocate the privileging of Whites and the subsequent Othering of people of color in all arenas, including education. (p. 27)

According to CRT, dominant society promotes the image of the nation freely embracing the principles of colorblindness, meritocracy and neutrality. Cynical of the assertions that equal opportunity and justice are available to all the Americans, Critical Race Theory posits that despite of the prevalent rhetoric of equality, individuals in the United States continue to receive economic, social, and political benefits or hindrances based upon their color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Given that dominant society promotes that United States has removed all major vestiges of racism and significant discriminatory practices, the prevailing perception of many non-minorities, and even some minorities, is that the United States is a fair country and race is no longer a factor in the likelihood of a person's success. In other words, people may believe citizens are not judged, constrained or subjected to limited opportunities based on their color. However for Critical Race theorists, these claims of equal opportunity for all are contradictory to the actual racial subjugation that has historically limited opportunities for

Blacks, and other marginalized groups, and continue to create disparities in wealth, jobs, and living conditions (Cole, 2009).

Balfour (2001) wrote:

Despite the expansion of formal equality and the rise of individual African Americans to positions of power, a line between ‘White’ and ‘Black’ Americans persists. It persists in income levels, residential patterns, incarceration rates, life expectancy, and a variety of other empirical measures. Furthermore, the existence of a color line in public opinion about the scope of racial injustice and the justification of policies designed to overcome it indicates how much still needs to be said. (Balfour, 2001, p. 2)

According to critical race scholars, there is a popular myth of meritocracy which suggests that the likelihood of success of individuals in the United States is based on their own work ethic, the quality of their skills, their attitude, and their ability to positively impact their work environment. Therefore, dominant society believes if individuals are not successful; it is not society’s fault (Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). In discussing how dominant society promotes the myth of American opportunity and rationalizes the lack of achievement for minorities, Kimberle Crenshaw stated:

Believing both that Blacks are inferior and that the economy impartially rewards the superior over the inferior, Whites see that most Blacks are indeed worse off than Whites are, which reinforces their sense that the market is operating “fairly and impartially”; those who logically should be on the bottom are on the bottom. This strengthening of Whites’ belief in the system in turn reinforces their beliefs that Blacks are indeed inferior. After all, equal opportunity is the rule, and the market is an impartial judge; if Blacks are on the bottom, it must reflect their relative inferiority. Racist ideology thus operates in

conjunction with the class components of legal ideology to reinforce the status quo, both in terms of class and race. (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. 116)

Consequently, some citizens view America as a meritocratic society which awards excellence and performance. Prosperity is viewed by these citizens as the result of hard work and intelligence in a fair market system. If Blacks are unsuccessful, it is an indication of their lack of hard work and intelligence. The nation is considered to be impartial. According to Crenshaw, the meritocracy myth that dominant society embraces perpetuates an image of fairness in the face of subtle, yet real, disparities of opportunity. As the United States made formal legal steps to dismantle visible manifestations of discrimination through court decisions and legislative actions, some people saw these efforts as resulting in the complete removal of racism. They believed that these positive actions toward equality removed any legitimate argument that Blacks were not included as equals in society (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Alan Freeman also discussed how racial discrimination could be examined from the perspective of the victim or the perpetrator. According to Freeman, the victim's perspective illuminates the pervasive social conditions that victims have to endure being members of a perpetual underclass group that is constantly subjected to discriminatory acts. Freeman asserted that for victims of racial discrimination, the reality of their lived experiences includes grappling with the lack of jobs, money, housing, and viable options for improvement. From the perspective of the victim, the most effective way to address racial discrimination requires affirmative steps to change the social conditions that promote and support discrimination. Alternatively, from the perpetrator's perspective, racial discrimination is specific actions that individuals take. From this vantage, discrimination does not pertain to conditions promoted in dominant society; it is simply the actions of misguided individuals that can be effectively addressed by dealing with the individuals. Therefore,

legislative action that outlaws or neutralizes the particular discriminatory practices of the individual perpetrators is sufficient remedy. According to Freeman, antidiscrimination law is not concerned with the condition of the victim or his or her status in society. From the perpetrator's view, legislation eradicated discrimination. Freeman wrote:

From this perspective, the law views racial discrimination not as a social phenomenon but merely as the misguided conduct of particular actors. It is a world in which, but for the conduct of these misguided ones, the system of equality of opportunity would provide distribution of the good things in life without racial disparities, and a world in which deprivations that did correlate with race would be "deserved" by those deprived on grounds of insufficient "merit." It is a world in which such things as "vested rights," objective selection systems," and adventitious decisions" (all of which serve to prevent victims from experiencing any change in conditions) are matters of fate, having nothing to do with the problem of racial discrimination. (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. 30)

Freeman's discussion is reflective of how proponents of American meritocracy and colorblindness may believe that anyone who makes claims of racism was simply trying to make an excuse for poor performance or lack of ability. Accordingly, convinced that the United States affords equal opportunity to its citizens, dominant society sees their own successes as proof of their merit. Similarly, Paulo Friere (1970) discussed this belief pattern in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He stated:

For them having more is an inalienable right, a right they acquired through their own 'effort,' with their 'courage to take risks.' If others do not have more, it is because they are incompetent and lazy, and worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude toward 'generous gestures' of the dominant class. Precisely because they are 'ungrateful' and

‘envious,’ the oppressed are regarded as potential enemies who must be watched. (Freire, 1970, p. 59)

Consequently, many in dominant society may believe that the failure of other citizens such as Blacks’ to avail themselves of the same opportunities demonstrates their lack of work ethic, motivation, and requisite skills. Kimberle Crenshaw stated, “If Whites believe that Blacks, because they are unambitious or inferior, get what they deserve, it becomes that much harder to convince Whites that something is wrong with the entire system” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. 116). Critical race scholars have suggested that the perception of fairness and equality in the nation is often quite different depending upon one’s personal experiences, socio-economic status, racial background, or gender. CRT views the assertions of America’s colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality as myths that neglect to acknowledge the existence of the racial hierarchy and systemic racism in United States. According to CRT, racism promotes and preserves systems of societal advantage and disadvantage that are based on skin color. Crenshaw asserted that America has only been formally dedicated to equality through its laws. She discussed that society perceives Blacks Americans to be inferior. Therefore, society does not view the economic, political, and social domination of Blacks as being inappropriate. Consequently, Blacks face unofficial racial discrimination, injury, and neglect which results in their subordination. Accordingly, that racist ideology prevails in its preservation of the status quo in class and race relations in the country.

Counter Stories

An additional tenet of Critical Race Theory addresses the significance of counter stories or narratives. Counter stories are premised on the belief that minorities are often silenced and their voices or perspectives are rarely considered. Howard (2008) wrote, “Equally important is that theoretical approaches such as CRT seek to illuminate the voices of individuals that have

historically silenced in educational research, thus providing a counterscript to mainstream accounts of their realities (Howard, 2008, p.3). Critical Race Theory endeavors to give voice to the marginalized so that their stories, histories, and experiences are heard. Solorzano (1997) stated, “Indeed, critical race theory views this knowledge as a strength and draws explicitly on the Person of Color’s lived experiences by including such methods as storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, chronicles, and narratives” (Solorzano, 1997, p.7). It is believed that critical insight can be gained from the stories and experiences of people of color that will help with understanding the complexity of racial dynamics. Ultimately, it is believed that this knowledge and insight will lead to positive actions to improve the conditions of marginalized people.

One major task of this review is to use Critical Race Theory as framework to examine the conditions present in the United States that have impacted the education of Black males. As Kafi D. Kumasi stated, “As it relates to the issue of school achievement, educational scholars have found CRT to be a powerful explanatory tool to help tease apart the intersections of race, class, and other modes of domination” (p. 200). He went on to say, “For many educational scholars, the power of CRT lies in its ability to avoid using cultural-deficit paradigms to explain the persistent achievement gap between White and nonWhite students and in its demand for a ‘deeper analysis of the historical and contemporary conditions that have created socioeconomic disparities’ (Dixson and Rousseau 2006, 122)” (Kumasi, 2011, p. 200). Accordingly, this review will seek to explore education for Black males through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Using some of the tenets of Critical Race Theory, historical and contemporary factors that impacted the education of Blacks in the United States will be examined. Special emphasis will be devoted to discussing

the role of teachers, and their impact, and their perspectives on the success or failure of Black males.

The History of Education for Blacks

In order to answer the questions regarding the educational challenges for Black students today, it is first imperative to acknowledge the tumultuous history of Blacks in the United States. Butchart articulated the necessity of examining historical factors when he stated:

To locate the roots of the contemporary crisis in Black education, we must go back well before the formal processes of legislating inequality. The destruction of the dream of independence and freedom through education began almost as soon as the freed people began to act on the dream. White terrorism, systematic, organized and relentless, targeted the dream with deadly accuracy. (Butchart, 2010, p. 36)

Any honest examination of this history will illuminate periods of unconcealed racial hostility, aggression, and marginalization. The number of events and incidences in which Black people were victimized by racial violence and subjugation are too numerous to delineate. Historically, it is indisputable that the United States has supported and implemented policies and practices that have contradicted the ideals of freedom and opportunity often professed in the country. The primary tenet of Critical Race Theory is the belief that racism has been a permanent and enduring component of the United States since its establishment (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Zamudio et al, 2011).

This assertion could be partially substantiated through an analysis of historical events and beliefs that have served to oppress and restrict people of color in the United States. From a critical race theory perspective, racism has greatly influenced the development of the nation as well as the social and economic status of its citizens and noncitizens. Consequently, the

acquisition of property, capital, and education has not been equally nor equitably accessible to all Americans (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, Dubois, 1903; Zamudio et al, 2011). CRT asserts that institutional racism and discrimination have worked to establish a society in which a portion of the country gained tremendous economic, social, and political benefits from the oppression of other humans based upon their color. CRT proponents believe that racism's permanence in the United States has been highly responsible for perpetuating a system of advantage and disadvantage dating back to before the establishment of the country.

Slavery's Denial of Educational Opportunity

One of the most damaging tenets of slavery was its solemn commitment to prevent Blacks from receiving education. Almost from the nation's inception, Blacks were denied access to education, a principle highly esteemed in this country. During periods of slavery, Blacks were explicitly forbidden from learning to read and write. In many areas throughout the South, to teach a slave to read or write was illegal. During the 1700s, believing that educated Blacks could ultimately harm or dismantle the profitable slave system, various laws, codes, and acts were adopted throughout the land to prevent Blacks from receiving education. For example, the South Carolina Act of 1740 explicitly stated the consequences and punishment persons would receive if they were found to have taught a slave to read. The act stated:

Whereas, the having slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences; Be it enacted, that all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe, in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write, every such person or persons shall, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds, current money, (Johnston, 1840, para XLV)

South Carolina was one among many places in the South that took definitive measures to deny Blacks access to education. The opposition to Black literacy during periods of slavery was significant and forceful. Butchart described how an educational boundary between Whites and Blacks were carefully policed. He stated:

Southern states enacted legislation barring Black literacy when slave unrest seemed to wax. Thus, South Carolina and Georgia proscribed formal schooling for its African-American population in 1740, after the Stono Rebellion, and much of the rest of the South passed similar laws in the 1830s, following publication of David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World and Nat Turner's abortive uprising. Not all southern states codified prohibitions on Black literacy but, even in those that did not, public opposition to African-American literacy had the effect of law.... (Butchart, 2007, p. 62)

Butchart went on to describe how poor citizens might have become complicit in the fight to prevent Black literacy. He wrote:

Night-time slave patrols, often manned predominantly by poor Whites, roamed the rural roads between plantations and scoured the back streets of the South's few towns and cities, watching for signs of clandestine schools or other Black literacy activity. Slaves caught reading might face whipping. Those found writing might suffer the loss of a thumb to make it difficult to hold a pen. Anyone caught teaching an African-American to read risked imprisonment, fines, and corporal punishment. (p. 63)

These actions highlight how legislative bodies and southern societies sought to establish laws and practices to keep Blacks from learning. The opposition to Black literacy in the South was intense and the opponents' commitment to prevent Blacks from receiving education was so

powerful that numerous acts, codes, and laws were established. An educated Black person was considered much more dangerous than ignorant slave. To preserve and maintain a society in which Blacks remained illiterate, lawmakers were willing to beat, maim, or potentially kill individuals to ensure that Blacks remain uneducated. As Jenkins wrote, “America has more than a 300-year history of higher education; yet not more than 139 years ago, it was illegal for Blacks of any age to be taught to read. The deficit incurred by history is substantial and has had a generational impact on the African American community, the family unit, and the individual” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 132). The cumulative economic, social, and psychological impact of hundreds of years of slavery upon the lives of millions of Black families in the United States is difficult to measure. With the assertion that racism has been endemic in the United States, Critical Race Theory purports that the historical acts of racism and injustice inflicted upon Blacks have had devastating generational effects on Black citizens’ ability to attain success within the country, including their educational outcomes.

Quality of Education in Segregated Black Schools

Popular perceptions of the segregated Black school suggest that the quality of education that Black students received within the segregated setting was very poor (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003). However, for many scholars, the perception of the segregated Black school being ineffective in educating Black students is false. Many scholars contend that in spite of definite inequities in regards to facilities, materials, and support, Black schools were effective in providing quality education to Black students (Bell, 2004; Siddle-Walker, 2005). Generally, Black segregated schools were situated in neighborhoods or settings where the students, teachers, and administrators all lived within the same community. The relationships and interactions between the students, teachers, and administrators went beyond the school walls and the regular

school day. In many instances, students and teachers were neighbors. Teachers had grown up with and had personal relationships with their students' parents. It was not uncommon for teacher, parent, and student to go to the same church or social functions within the community (Milner & Howard, 2004). This increased involvement and familiarity with the student's family enabled the teacher in the segregated schools to forge meaningful relationships and implement creative strategies to support the educational and social development of the student. Many researchers contend that the uniqueness of the segregated Black school allowed educators the flexibility to focus not only on preparing the child academically, but also providing social and emotional support, as well as essential training and skills to help the child navigate successfully through a harsh and discriminatory world. Within the segregated schools, Black teachers were very familiar with their students and they had an intimate knowledge and understanding of the obstacles and challenges that their students would face as they encountered the real world. The Black teachers, themselves, had personally lived similar experiences as their students. They had faced and, to a certain extent, overcome some of the inevitable racial hurdles to become successful in life. Accordingly, these Black teachers were able to use their personal experience and knowledge within the classroom to prepare students with essential skills to promote their current and future success (Milner & Howard, 2004; Roseboro & Ross, 2009; Siddle-Walker, 2001; Siddle-Walker, 2005).

Roseboro & Ross (2009) suggest that Black female teachers taught their students that life would afford them opportunities, but due to the reality of racism, the possibilities were not endless. These Black teachers taught their students that they had the power to claim some of the authority that had been taken away from them. For their students, these Black teachers served in multiple capacities. These teachers were often considered as surrogate parent figures,

disciplinarians, counselors, and role models responsible for their students' total development (Milner, 2012). They emphasized structure and the fact that it was essential that the students learn the content. With high expectations for their students, the teachers had a way of teaching that led to achievement (Milner & Howard, 2004). They were not willing to allow excuses such as blaming the family or society for student failure (Foster, 1991).

Some researchers have indicated that Black educators, prior to desegregation, taught students with a sense of urgency (Milner & Howard, 2004; Milner, 2012; Siddle-Walker, 2005). The Black teacher did not accept mediocrity and was insistent that the students reach their potential (Delpit, 1995). The concept of "other mothering" has been discussed by numerous researchers. This concept articulates that the level of care in which Black teachers had for their students was comparable to the care that would be received if the student was actually a member of the teacher's biological family (Milner, 2012, Roseboro & Ross, 2009). The "care" demonstrated by the Black teachers was highly personalized which enabled the teacher to develop strategies that were effective for their students' growth. Roseboro & Ross (2009) indicated that Black female teachers were significantly different in the manner in which they displayed "care" in their educational settings. These Black educators' lives had been greatly impacted by their historical, social, and spiritual experiences. Accordingly, the educational practices that the teachers utilized with their students were also highly influenced by their personal knowledge and the collective experiences as members of a race that had persevered in spite of racism. Milner (2012) discussed James Vasquez's notion of some Black teachers being "Warm Demanders." Black teachers so described were considered to be no-nonsense, structured and disciplined to prepare students for the harsh world in which they would encounter. These teachers would not accept nonsense or poor performance because they knew that the students

were able to exceed the level of performance that they were displaying. With the conviction to empower their students, these teachers determined to teach and provide their students with the knowledge and skills to be able to avoid potential pitfalls, to serve their communities, and to assume positions of leadership. Although their strategies may have been considered by some as being unorthodox, these Black teachers believed that their strategies were essential in order to effectively prepare their students for a successful and meaningful life (Shuman, 2010).

Deficit Perspective and Black Males

According to some scholars, many schools and educators often operate from a deficit perspective in regards to the education and treatment of Black students, especially Black male students (Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012; Harper, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Noguera, 2008, Yosso, 2004). Theresa Perry (2003) discussed how popular discussions regarding the lower achievement of Black students usually result casting blame from a deficit perspective. Perry wrote:

We have to face the fact that if we are going to have this public conversation about African-American student achievement, it will inevitably become a conversation that blames Black parents, Black students, and the Black community. The danger is that it will become yet another location for the recycling of the ideology of African-American moral, cultural, and intellectual deficiency. (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, p. 8)

Consequently, Black male students have to struggle in schools with oppression that is representative of the social, cultural and political struggles of Black males in larger society. Deficit Thinking is characterized by the belief that there is something wrong with Black children. Tyrone Howard (2008) discussed the examples of stereotypes and challenges that Black males face in school. Howard wrote:

All too often African American males have been caught in a web of stereotyped notions of race and gender that place them at considerable disadvantages in schools and ultimately society. The mere exploration of the social construction of the Black male image in the U.S. over the last four centuries reveals a highly problematic depiction ranging from the docile or bewildered slave, to the hyper-sexed brute, to the gregarious Sambo, the exploitative pimp or slickster, to the super athlete and entertainer. The social and political ramifications of each of these images still influence the perceptions of scores of young Black men today, including through their own perpetuation of these images. These characteristics all...undoubtedly plays a role in the racial and gender politics that play out in schools across the country. (Howard, 2008, p. 966)

Ladson-Billings (1998) described how the term “At-risk” is used almost synonymously in reference to Black males in schools. Individuals who prescribe to this type of deficit framework believe that Black children lack normative culture, the skills, and values that are needed to be successful in school. Some scholars have suggested that deficit thinking impacts the education of Black male children from early childhood to higher education (Duncan, 2002; hooks, 2004; Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012). Garrett Duncan discussed how the dominant storyline implies that Black males are too different from other students. Because of Black males are considered as being different and oppositional as compared to the “normal” students, it should be not be surprising that the Black male will have difficulty in school (Duncan, 2002). Because of the presence of societal stereotypes regarding Black males, some teachers may view the Black males in their classroom as potential problems, unmotivated, and as being oppositional toward receiving education. Accordingly, teachers may have low expectations for the Black male students. Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry (2012) discussed that negative stereotypes start at a young

age for Black males. To illustrate this point, they highlighted Ferguson's (2001) comments on the "institutional narrative" on Black children:

According to the statistics, the worse-behaved children in the school are Black and male, and when they take tests they score way below their grade level. They eat candy, refuse to work, fight, gamble, chase, hit, instigate, cut class, cut school... They are defiant, disruptive, disrespectful, and profane. These Black males fondle girls, draw obscene pictures, make lewd comments, intimidate others, and call teacher names. They are banished from the classroom to the hall, to the discipline office, to the suspension room, to the streets so that others can learn (p. 46)

Shaun Harper (2009) discussed similar dominant stereotypes that are prevalent in K-12 schools regarding Black males. Often, Black males have teachers who may anticipate the worse regarding their educability. He wrote:

The typical Black boy in K-12 educational setting is taught almost exclusively by White women who combine an insufficient anticipation for his academic achievement with high expectations for disruptive behavior, intellectual stupidity, and dispassion for learning that will ultimately culminate with high school dropout. (Harper, 2009, p. 698)

Some educators, columnists, and writers have been blunt and unapologetic in their negative critique of the Black male. Deficit thinking views the student, student's culture and community as deprived. As a result, teachers may blame the student, their parents, and their socio-economic status for the lack of academic success (Delpit, 1995). In Rema Reynolds' (2010) study on the how Black parents perceived the educational environment that their Black sons encountered in school, many of the parent participants indicated that racism was at the center of the unpleasant and negative experiences that they and their sons had in school. Reynolds highlighted how some

parents felt misunderstood and unspoken hostility as they communicated with school officials regarding their sons. The parents indicated that they and their sons often faced micro-aggressions in the schools. Reynolds (2010) cited Davis (1989) in defining micro-aggressions as stunning acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of superiority and constitute a verification of Black inferiority” (p. 154). Racism, manifested through low teacher expectations, disparate racial treatment, and hostile beliefs, was common in the schools. According to the parent participants, teachers and school leaders believed and exhibited stereotypical expectations of poor achievement and inappropriate behavior for their Black sons. In order to combat the destructive consequences that the prevalent racist ideology may have on their sons, the parents indicated that they felt an urgency to prepare their sons for racism that the young boys would have to endure in schools. Reynolds described how parents utilized Dubois’s (1903) concept of Double Consciousness—“the practice of looking at oneself through the eyes of others and performing self-checks regularly to ensure that personal behaviors do not substantiate possible stereotypes those of the majority often subscribe to in relation to the minority” p. 154. Reynolds discussed how schools may engage in subtle and racist practices that serve to marginalize Black males. Reynolds wrote:

School officials’ lack of positive regard for Black males, the absence of a belief in Black males’ ability to achieve, the doling out of harsher punishments, rendering of derogatory and demoralizing comments, the consistent slight when it comes to providing them leadership opportunities, the overrepresentation in special education programs designed for those with discrepancies in learning, and the reluctance to refer them for advanced classes regardless of class (Howard, 2008) must be examined if we wish to counter the

underachievement of this particular segment of the Black population (Reynolds, 2010, p. 155).

Statistics indicate that Black males are disciplined in schools disproportionately with suspensions and expulsions beyond their population in schools. In addition, more than any other subgroup, Black males receive negative academic consequences such as retentions that may lead to further negative outcomes such dropping out and failure to graduate. Critical Race Theory uses voice and experiential knowledge of people of color to illuminate the role that teacher expectations may have on the academic achievement and behavior outcomes of Black males. CRT's proponents view the use of narrative and counter stories as being an effective means to identify and disrupt potential racist practices that may be present in schools (Reynolds, 2010).

Inequitable Education and Competition

As stated earlier, education has been considered the method by which any person can improve and receive the skills necessary to obtain success in life. However, many public K-12 schools that are in less affluent communities serving a large percentage of Black or minority students do not have the resources that are needed to provide their students with the highest quality of education. Often, some of the teachers in majority Black schools are not highly qualified in the critical academic areas such as math and science. As a result, students may not receive instruction from the best experts in those fields. The lack of highly certified educators serves to hinder the students' ability to compete with other students in affluent communities in regards to academic performance. In addition, these schools often have inexperienced educators who are still learning to teach. These teachers also may have difficulty relating to these students because of cultural differences. Disparities in resources and personnel in these schools serve to make it extremely challenging for students to receive the necessary skills to be successful in

higher education and beyond. In spite of disparities in the quality of early and secondary education, these students are still expected to compete at levels comparable to students who may have benefited from better resources, better schools, and more experienced educators. The quality of schooling students receive has a significant impact on their ability to graduate, attend college, or secure adequate employment. As McNamee and Miller (2004) stated:

The quality of schools and the quality of educational opportunity vary according to where one lives, and where one lives depend on familial economic resources and race.To the extent that parents are actually successful in passing on such advantages, educational attainment is primarily a reflection of family income. In sum, it is important to recognize that individual achievement occurs within a context of unequal educational opportunity.
(p. 7)

Even as some policies have been adopted and implemented to try to equalize school funding, disparities still exist. Students of color from impoverished backgrounds are faced with immense challenges in overcoming these disparities. As Derrick Bell (2004) wrote:

The latter problem should come as little surprise. Schools in poor, segregated neighborhoods that have been marginalized for decades will not suddenly achieve high-quality education and produce students competitive with those of the traditionally privileged schools just because they are now given equal funding. (p. 163)

Hidden Curriculum

School curriculum has a critical role in any discussion of improving academic achievement. Students become educated by gaining the knowledge and understanding of the adopted curriculum. In essence, curriculum is what schools teach and what students learn. Schools often organize curriculum around specific adopted standards and objectives. However,

much of what schools teach and students learn are not a part of the adopted standards and learning objectives. The “hidden curriculum” pertains to how a school environment organizes its programs, policies, procedures, and practices to carry out the goals of dominant society. Kentli (2009) cites Phillip Jackson (1968) as articulating the concept of Hidden Curriculum in his book, *Life in Classrooms*. He identified social aspects of schooling in which certain values and expectations brought rewards in school. Among other things, students learned through the hidden curriculum to be quiet, exercise restraint, complete assignments, show allegiance to teachers and peers (Kentli, 2009). Hidden curriculum includes intangible attributes such as the school or the community’s accepted values, attitudes, and beliefs. Boykin describe hidden curriculum as the core intrinsic values that serve as blueprints for living or standards for conducting one’s self. Schools promote certain themes and perform cultural socialization (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005). Also, Giroux (2011) discussed the tendency of teachers to acquiesce to the will of dominant society. He wrote:

But at the present time, it appears that the vast majority of public school teachers have yet to step beyond the taken-for-granted assumptions that shape their view of pedagogy and structure their educational experiences. Mass culture, teacher-training institutions, and the power of the state all play a powerful role in pressuring teaching to give unquestioning support to the basic assumptions of the wider dominant culture. (Giroux, 2011, p. 39)

Many times the knowledge that is gained by students is not directly taught by the teacher but implied by the teachers’ actions or attitude that students may easily observe (Sari & Doganay, 2009). Zamudio et al (2011) discussed concepts of the overt curriculum: what is explicitly taught; the implicit curriculum: what students learn unintentionally; and the null curriculum: what students learn by what they are not taught. According to Zamudio and her colleagues, much

of the curriculum that is taught in schools in the United States emphasizes knowledge and experiences acceptable to dominant groups over all others. As a result of this emphasis, the knowledge and experiences of minority ethnic groups are not highly valued. European American knowledge becomes the standard in which curriculum is arranged.

The Teacher

Teachers have a significant role in the quality of education that students receive. Although the demographics indicate that public school students in the United States are becoming more diverse, this diversity is not reflected in the teaching population. There continues to be a decline in the number of teachers of color that are working in public schools within this country. The vast majority of teachers in the United States are White and female. In 2007- 2008, White teachers made 83% of all elementary and secondary teachers in the United States. Black teachers made up 6.7% of all elementary and secondary teachers in the US (NCES, 2009). These statistics have been enduring for decades. Accordingly, most Black students may matriculate from kindergarten through high school without ever being taught by a Black teacher during their educational experience. Many scholars consider the lack of minority teachers as a significant problem because they believe many White teachers may lack the knowledge, experience, and training that would be beneficial in working with Black males. Given that negative images of Black males are pervasive in public media and society, these damaging portrayals are often promoted regarding Black male students in schools. As a consequence, some White and Black teachers may adopt these stereotypical perceptions toward the young Black male students within their classroom (Shuman, 2010). These perceptions tend to interfere with the teachers' beliefs about their ability to be effective in teaching Black males (Douglas et al., 2008; Shuman, 2010). Teachers may also hold lower expectations for Black males, give them more negative criticism,

and provide less positive attention and praise (Irvine, 1985; Shuman, 2010). In addition, some CRT proponents assert that for some teachers, issues of race and racism are not considered as significant factors in regards to students' educational success. In regards to education, the teachers believe that racism was and is in the past. CRT proponents believe that many teachers perceive the United States as presently being a colorblind society. The election of President Barack Obama may be considered by some as evidence of the nation's evolution to a society in which individuals are not hindered by their race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The concept of Meritocracy is often advanced as being the catalyst for individual prosperity. That is, any individual success is achieved based on that individual's ability and efforts. Teachers across the country believe in the concept of colorblindness. Because many teachers perceive that no insidious racist practices are hindering the Black males from availing themselves of America's opportunities and promises, discussion or claims of discrimination are viewed skeptically as excuses for poor achievement and lack of effort. Accordingly, current manifestations of racism, though real for Black males, are dismissed as nonfactors. Black male students, therefore, may learn to overlook, devalue or rationalize contemporary forms of racism, even though they may be harmed by those manifestations. Many years ago, Carter G. Woodson, in his classic, *The Miseducation of Negro* (1933), described how schooling encourages many but often times served to discourage Black students. He wrote:

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. The Negro thus educated is a hopeless liability of the race" (Woodson, P. xiii).

Woodson description of the negative impact of miseducation for Black students is very similar to Paulo Freire's (1970) description of what the oppressed learn from the oppressor. Paulo Freire wrote:

Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing. Know nothing and are incapable of learning anything- that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive-that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. (Freire, p. 63)

Diller and Moule (2005) discussed how current teacher's beliefs and instructional practices are reflective of the norms, values, and beliefs of the larger society. They asserted that societal prejudices and biases are very much a part of educational systems. Cultural competence or the ability of teachers to successfully teach students from different backgrounds and culture is greatly needed. They wrote:

The educational system is, after all, a microcosm of broader society and is susceptible to the same racial tensions and dynamics....cultural competence depends on self-awareness, which includes, above all, awareness of the attitudes and prejudices that teachers bring to their work. Neither teacher nor student exists in a vacuum. Both carry into the classroom prejudices and stereotypes about ethnicity of the other, and these, if unaddressed, cannot help but interfere with learning. (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 29)

In education, the teachers play a significant role in how Black males begin to develop and formulate their views toward learning and schools. Academic engagement predicts long term academic achievement. Black males' level of engagement with curriculum is affected by their teacher's level of engagement with them. The manner in which teachers communicate with

students may impact how the Black male student perceives himself or his race. Often, teachers do not feel comfortable communicating with Black males. They interact in manner that emphasizes and asserts the authoritarian position that they have as teachers over on their Black male students. Woodson described how such an approach fails to produce positive relationships needed to encourage academic achievement. Woodson wrote, “You cannot serve people by giving them orders as to what to do. The real servant of the people must live among them, think with them, feel for them, and die for them.” Again, Paulo Freire (1970) voiced a similar sentiment in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He wrote:

They talk about the people, but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change. A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust. (Freire, p. 60)

Many researchers have indicated that Black males are often more engaged in academics when they are very young (Boykin, Tyler, and Miller, 2005; Langhout and Mitchell, 2008; Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). During this time, the Black males may demonstrate their excitement for learning by speaking out or moving about the classroom frequently. According to Boykin, Tyler, and Miller (2005), communalism and movement are natural expressions of Black culture. However, these types of behaviors may not be considered appropriate to the majority of teachers whose culture is different. Swanson, Cunningham, and Spencer (2003) discussed research by Dweck (1978) and Irvine (1990) that suggested that teacher-student experiences and interactions are often different for Black males. Their research indicated that Black males were more likely to receive non-verbal criticism than any other students. According to the researchers, at a young age, Black males begin to perceive the differences in how they are treated and how

they are viewed compared to their peers. Citing Spencer (1986), Swanson, Cunningham & Spencer (2003) noted a decline in the academic achievement for Black males in 2nd grade largely influenced by the dissonance between the teacher perceptions and student actions. The young Black male student may suffer academically as he deals with the reality of stereotypical perceptions that society has regarding Black males. bell hooks indicated that the curiosity that is viewed as a sign of “genius” in young White male students is often viewed as a sign of trouble making in young Black boys. In order for Black males to be viewed as “smart” in schools, they have to demonstrate behaviors considered as acceptable in dominant society such as being obedient and quiet. (hooks, 2004). In Boykin, Tyler, and Miller’s study examining the cultural themes present in elementary school, the researchers found that mainstream cultural themes were more prevalent and promoted by educators. Mainstream culture favored individualism, competition, and bureaucracy orientation. Boykin and colleagues indicated that there was dissonance and a cultural mismatch between mainstream and African American culture ethos. Some of these African American cultural behaviors were considered inappropriate and may have been against the school rules. Some scholars have noted how Black male students receive more discipline from teachers and from school administration. Young students of color might not have a full understanding of how their personal actions and how racial notions intersect to influence the educational experiences that they will have. Yet as these students begin to have more interactions and experiences with their teachers and peers, they begin to develop a greater awareness of how their racial status is viewed by society and school. Black students are consistently rated as poor classroom citizens compared to White students (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). As they age, the Black male students may tend to lose their zest for learning. They may begin to develop a mistrust of the teachers and the school. Because they are more likely to

exhibit behaviors that are contrary the acceptable norms of society, they may become frequent recipients of disciplinary actions. Ladson-Billings (2011) discussed how schools are often restrictive and exert considerable effort in controlling the behavior of Black males. The negative attention that the Black students receive regarding discipline often results in them dissociating and disengaging from school. Langhout and Mitchell (2008) wrote, “the implicit message is academic engagement and learning is less important than following the rules and if one did not follow the rules, one does not belong with the other children.” Teachers are conduits through which values of the dominant social class are transmitted to students (Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002). As the dominant ideology, values, and culture are promoted as normal and acceptable in schools, the Black male student may quickly learn through a hidden curriculum that his culture is not valued. bell hooks (2004) discussed how Black males have faced challenges in the educational system historically. She wrote:

Groomed to remain permanent members of an underclass,...Black males without class privilege have always been targeted for miseducation. They have been and are taught that “thinking” is not valuable labor, that “thinking’ will not help them to survive. Tragically many Black males have not resisted this socialization. It is no accident that many brilliant-thinking Black males end up imprisoned for, even as boys, they were deemed threatening, bad, and dangerous. (hooks, p. 34)

Langhout and Mitchell (2008) asserted, “The hidden-curriculum, therefore, reinforces institutionalized racism and classism with meta-communication that working class and working poor racial and ethnic minority students, especially boys, don’t belong in school” (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008). Through the hidden curriculum, Black male students learn many negative lessons. They learned that their history is one in which they were dominated and subjugated.

They learn their history and culture is not as important as others. They often learn that their teachers have lower expectations for them. The message presented and instilled within many Black males is often very clear. It is that they are the least valued members of society and underachievement and failure is their future (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Teachers and society present the explicit, implicit, and null curriculum to Black male students; this curriculum often has a debilitating and devastating impact on the young men.

To counter this destructive mindset, Critical Race scholars believe that it is essential for Black students, especially males, to receive instruction about their history and unique culture. CRT proponents believe that pedagogy that allows Black males opportunity to learn their unique history may help to instill a positive identity and educational confidence within the Black male students. This sentiment was also articulated by Carter G. Woodson (1933). He wrote:

To educate the Negro we must find out exactly what his background is, what he is today, what his possibilities are, and how to begin with him as he is and make him a better individual of the kind that he is. Instead of cramming the Negro's mind with what others have shown that they can do, we should develop his latent powers that he may perform in a society a part of which others are not capable. (Woodson, p. 151)

Researchers, practitioners, and society have postulated numerous ideas as to why Black male achievement tends to lag behind other subgroups. Critical Race scholars advocate for deeper analyses into the hidden messages that are prevalent in society and within schools regarding Black males. They insist that illuminating these messages may provide space for the identification of possible action to address Black male underachievement.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical Race Theory in education explores how curriculum and educational policies have failed to connect children and their community. Minority students, especially Black males, have faced numerous challenges in their effort to attain educational success. Seeking to develop meaningful strategies to improve the quality of education for Blacks, some critical race theorists have reviewed the works of Paulo Freire. In his classic, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) discussed how oppressed or marginalized groups must be active participants in their own liberation through education. He suggested that through proper education, the oppressed could critically discover their humanity. According to Freire (1970), oppressed groups must struggle for their right to educate themselves. He wrote:

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for redemption. (Freire, p. 54)

Freire suggested that the oppressed could not look to the oppressor to provide a liberating education. Freire believed that pedagogy had to confront the culture of domination. Education has to be catalyst for changing the way the oppressed perceive the world. In addition, Freire asserted that pedagogy must work to eliminate myths that were significant in the oppressive system. Freire believed that it was essential that education help the oppressed recognize that much of their lives had been affected by a climate of oppression and domination. Therefore, the oppressed must fight against the “oppressed mentality” and become active participants in reclaiming their humanity. The student, along with the teacher, must engage in dialogue,

reflection, political action, and educational projects to carve out their liberation and secure their humanity. He wrote:

The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades. (Freire, p. 124)

Critical Race Theorists have also examined the works of Henry Giroux regarding education. Giroux (2011) in his book, *On Critical Pedagogy*, examined how classrooms have primarily functioned to reproduce the status quo in society. Giroux took issue with how traditional pedagogy with its emphasis on technical aspects of education, has given sparse attention to the historical inequalities and current struggles related to race, class, and gender. Very similar to Burrell's (2010) discussions of propaganda, Woodson's discussion of the miseducation of Negroes, and West's (2001) discussion of market forces, Giroux also discussed how mass media operates as a teaching machine that often has negative consequences for marginalized groups and students. According to Giroux, the market-driven model of education sponsored by the government promotes traditional pedagogy. The goal of education becomes to train students so that the status quo is preserved and those in power continue to reap the economic benefits. In essence, education becomes survival of the fittest. Giroux discussed that traditional pedagogy emphasizes rote learning, memorization, and high stakes testing. With a market driven rationality, traditional pedagogy promotes top down control of curriculum, ruthless competition, and a culture of conformity. In opposition to traditional pedagogy approaches, Giroux advocated for a Critical Pedagogy perspective that would provide marginalized students with a language of hope and possibility. Critical Pedagogy engages

students and teachers while bringing attention to the ongoing struggle over knowledge, values, social relations, and political agency. Encouraging students to be critical agents who actively interrogate their world rather than simply conforming to the status quo, critical pedagogy insists upon inquiry and alternative teaching methods in public and higher education. Giroux believe that institutions and individuals that embrace critical pedagogy were providing powerful liberating education. Giroux stated:

All of these public intellectuals have in common a vision and project of rethinking what role education might play in providing students with the habits of mind and ways of acting that would enable them to identify and address the most acute challenges and dangers facing a world increasingly dominated by a mode of instrumental and technical thinking that is morally and spiritually bankrupt. (Giroux, 2011, p. 12)

Critical race theory provides a framework to bring about change in education through the use of critical pedagogy. With critical pedagogy, attention is given to the contradictions and variances in power and privilege that exist in the world. Critical pedagogy strives to provide students with the “praxis” to awaken their understanding of concepts of transformation, resistance, and counter-hegemony. Critical pedagogy emphasizes active participation through reflection, dialogue, and action to bring about the ideals of democracy and justice. Schools therefore would transform into sites where students develop critical consciousness in order to identify and act against various forms of oppression. Critical pedagogy attempts to unveil the hidden curriculum and status quo that contributes to exploitation. Students are taught to reject the mentality that encourages them to accept information without question. Instead, critical pedagogy encourages students to embrace liberating education which requires them to be active participators and problem-solvers.

Multicultural Education

Some scholars have viewed multicultural education with its emphasis on recognizing the various layers and components of a multicultural society as means to promote tolerance and overcome prejudice. Multicultural education has goals such as reducing prejudice and discrimination as well as promoting equality. Jay indicated that "...the ultimate goal of multicultural education is to move us towards the creation of concepts, paradigms, themes, and explanations that challenge mainstream knowledge, not help keep it in place" (Jay, 2003, p. 5). However, some scholars have argued that multiculturalism does not alter the inherit systems which perpetuate inequity and domination. Lynn and Parker (2006) cited Jay's (2003) discussion of using critical race theory to argue for the re-examination of the hidden racial curriculum in multicultural education. Jay (2003) discussed how schools promoted multicultural curriculum but limited its transformative possibilities. These scholars assert that multicultural education only provides a cursory overview of various aspects of different ethnic groups. They believe multicultural education's tendency to highlight cultural aspects such food, religions, and music ultimately only serves to exoticize certain cultures or ethnic groups. In other words, the cursory view of these cultures brings attention to how they are different from the norm or mainstream culture. Consequently, a more substantive and comprehensive analysis to allow greater understanding of various cultures is rarely afforded. Ladson-Billings discussed how multicultural education does not encompass what it was originated designed to promote. She stated:

...multicultural education is but a shadow of its conceptual self. Rather than engage students in provocative thinking about the contradictions of U.S. ideals and lived realities, teachers often find themselves encouraging students to sing "ethnic" songs, eat ethnic foods, and do ethnic dances. Consistently, manifestations of multicultural education

in the classroom are superficial and trivial “celebrations of diversity.” (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 33)

Ladson-Billings indicated that teacher candidates need to become knowledgeable about their own culture as well as the culture of others. This expanded knowledge would be beneficial in understanding the power of pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) wrote:

Rather than add on versions of multicultural education or human relations courses that serve to exoticize diverse students as “other,” a culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society. (Ladson-Billings, p. 483)

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Instead of multicultural education, scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings have advocated for Cultural Relevant Pedagogy. In this respect, students’ culture is emphasized as a means to transcend the negative effects of dominant society. Instead of denying, subjugating, or denigrating students’ culture, cultural relevant pedagogy seeks to affirm the culture of students. Therefore, students are encouraged to embrace and accept their unique cultural characteristics and not to feel as if they have to adopt the culture of others. The goals of cultural relevant pedagogy are to help students to achieve academically, to demonstrate cultural competence, and to critique the existing social structure.

In her article, *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* (1995), Gloria Ladson-Billings discussed her research regarding teachers who were viewed to be highly effective in educating minority students. The teachers who participated in the study had been nominated by people in the community church for being respectful to the students as well as enthusiastic about their teaching. The teachers that were nominated as participants in the research were cross-

checked by the principal according to criteria for student achievement and classroom management. Ladson-Billings worked with a total of eight teachers in an elementary school in a small Black school district in North Carolina. All teachers were female and five were Black and three were White. The teachers were interviewed and observed for a two year period. They periodically met as group to collaborate regarding practices. Ladson-Billings noted that the common thread of the teachers who participated in the study was their concern for the implications their work had on the lives of the students, the welfare of the community, and unjust social arrangements. Ladson-Billings indicated that the teachers worked to prepare the students to face the challenges that life would present to them. She indicated that in some instances the teachers had defied administrative directives or mandates to do what was right for students. These teachers displayed a willingness to engage in action research based upon their beliefs about literacy approaches best suited for students.

According to Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant pedagogy was very prevalent in the teaching approach utilized by the eight teachers in the study. As a consequence the students demonstrated gains in student achievement and maintained their cultural integrity. The teachers in the study were not reluctant to identify political aspects of the students' community and social world. Thus the students were allowed to use community circumstances as official knowledge. Student learning became a form of cultural critique. Ladson-Billings indicated that in the teachers' classrooms the students were not permitted to fail. The teachers would use an assortment of techniques and methods to ensure that the students completed their work. The teachers did not make excuses for the students and a "language of lacking" was not present with the teachers. Also, Ladson-Billings indicated that the teachers made a conscious decision to be a part of the community of the students. This decision helped the teachers to maintain positive

relationships with the students, their parents, and the community. The teachers also emphasized community learning instead of competitive individual achievement. Ladson-Billings wrote:

The teachers used this ethos of reciprocity and mutuality to insist that one person's success was the success of all and one person's failure was the failure of all. The feelings were exemplified by the teacher who insisted, "We're a family. We have to care for one another as if our very survival depended on it....Actually, it does!" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 481)

In discussing culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings identified three major components upon which culturally relevant pedagogy relies. The first is that students must experience academic success. According to Ladson-Billings it is essential that students choose academic excellence. Teachers must attend to the student's academic needs and not merely try to make the students feel good. The second major component is having students to develop cultural competence. Cultural competence pertains to having an awareness of one's culture and the cultures of others. Ladson-Billings discussed that it is important for students to maintain the cultural integrity. That is not to feel as if they have to abandon their own culture and adopt the culture of others in order to obtain success. In discussing Fordham and Ogbu (1986) research, Ladson-Billings (1995) discussed how Fordham and Ogbu indicated that some Black students feared being ostracized for showing that they were interested in academic achievement. For these students, demonstrating an interest in academic achievement was considered the equivalent of acting "acting White." Through cultural competence students learn that their own culture is of value and academic achievement does not conflict with their culture. Ladson-Billings discussed how culturally relevant teachers could utilize a student's culture as a vehicle for learning. The third component of culturally relevant pedagogy was that students must develop critical

consciousness to challenge the status quo. Through the development of sociopolitical consciousness, students would learn to examine the cultural norms, values, and institutions that maintain social and economic inequities.

The role of the teacher is critical in students' development of this critical perspective in analyzing their place in the world. As Howard (2003) wrote:

To become culturally relevant, teachers need to engage in honest, critical reflection that challenges them to see how their positionality influences their students in either positive or negative ways. Critical reflection should include an examination of how race, culture, and social class shape students' thinking, learning, and various understandings of the world. (Howard, 2003, p. 167)

Howard noted how deficit oriented thinking is pervasive in traditional education. He proposed that teachers begin to question themselves regarding belief patterns that they may harbor. For example, the following questions could be utilized for self-reflection: What interactions did I have with diverse individuals growing up? Have I had prejudiced thoughts regarding these individuals? What effects would these thoughts have on the individual who come through my class? Questions such as these would serve to promote self-reflection to help teachers understand that teaching is not neutral but contributes to political consciousness (Howard, 2003). Howard describes culturally relevant pedagogy as the effective means of meeting the academic and social needs of diverse students. Racial and cultural differences between students and teachers may lead to school failure of students of color. He stated:

The persistent school failure of an increasing number of racially diverse students should prompt educators to ask the difficult, yet obvious question: What, if anything, does race and culture have to do with the widespread underachievement of nonmainstream

students? Thus, the need to rethink pedagogical practices is critical if underachieving student populations are to have improved chances for school success. (Howard, 2003, p. 196)

Given the challenges that Black students face in schools, culturally relevant pedagogy may provide educators with effective strategies to not only meet their academic needs but also provide validation and support to their social development. Culturally relevant pedagogy stands on belief that there is value and strength in students' culture. Demonstrating high expectations and a concept of care, teachers could provide culturally relevant instruction that embraces the students' strengths to promote academic excellence as well as community empowerment (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billing, 1995).

Critical Race Pedagogy

Marvin Lynn (2004) described Critical Race Pedagogy as an analysis of racial, ethnic and gender subordination in education. It illuminates the intersection of race, identity, and pedagogy within and outside of schools. It places high value on the perceptions, experiences, and counter hegemonic practices of educators of color. Accordingly, it emphasizes liberatory or emancipatory pedagogical strategies and techniques that educators of color deemed effective with marginalized students. With the principles of critical race theory as its foundation, critical race pedagogy centers issues of race and racism in its analysis of schools and education. Critical race pedagogy seeks to address the complexities of race and education with the ultimate goal of seeking justice and equity. Lynn discussed that Black social justice educators or Critical race pedagogues were committed to pedagogy that 1) taught of the importance of African culture, 2) had engaging dialogue in classrooms, 3) engaged daily self-affirmation acts, & 4) resisted and challenged hegemonic administrators (Lynn, 2004). Jennings and Lynn (2005) identified three

broad characteristics of critical race pedagogy: Negotiation with power, the critique of self, and the need to be counterhegemonic. These scholars contended that it is first necessary to have understanding of how racism has shaped major institutions including education. They also asserted that critical race pedagogy recognizes the existing power dynamics and their various manifestations within schools. Finally, they posited that critical race pedagogy's emphasis on self-reflection as being important in illuminating how individuals or groups are stratified in society. They stated that critical race pedagogy's use of narrative voices of people of color serves as forms of resistance and is a valuable tool for understanding the world. Jennings and Lynn (2005) stated:

Last, a Critical Race Pedagogy must encourage the practice of an explicitly liberatory form of both teaching and learning. The primary characteristic of a liberatory pedagogy is its goal of advocating for justice and equity in both schooling and education as a necessity if there is to be justice and equity in the broader society. (Jenning & Lynn, p. 28)

Critical Race Pedagogy encourages Black teachers to actively use culture as means to provide educational gains to Black students. Lynn (2006) indicated that that the pedagogy seeks to enhance lives of the students while challenging destructive efforts. Lynn wrote, "The aim of critical race pedagogy, therefore, is to invite Black teachers to draw on culture as a basis for fostering the academic achievement of African American students and to investigate the liberatory dimensions of their teaching practices" (Lynn, 2006, p. 116).

In the effort to pursue viable educational solutions regarding Black male students, Lynn and Jennings (2009) stressed the need for spirited discussions with Black males regarding life goals. These scholars emphasized the importance of considering the emotional needs of these

students. Lynn and Jennings (2009) discussed that mutual respect between students and teachers is essential for teaching and learning. Therefore, teachers must be authentic and sincere in their effort to respect the students' point of view, understand their humanity, and respect their individuality. This sentiment was also articulated by Duncan (2002) who discussed how some schools that have been effective in educating Black males have established a strong connection to the students and their community, caring about their academic and cultural success. Sheppard (2009) discussed that culturally responsive teaching can validate the life experiences and culture of students. Accordingly, instead of devaluing Black culture, teachers make an effort to emphasize the positive attributes and encourage students to maintain their cultural identity.

Summary

The challenges that Black males face in schools, as well as society, are significant. Educational statistics, without a doubt, communicate a narrative of underachievement and a future of failure for Black males. Some educational practitioners, legislators, and the media have promoted the image of Black males as the worst students: poor learners, oppositional, disruptive, unmotivated, and dangerous. The purpose of this review was to utilize Critical Race Theory as a theoretical lens to explore the historical and current conditions which impact the academic achievement of Black students, especially Black males. Marvin Lynn (2006) wrote:

CRT begins with notion that racism is a natural and, in fact, necessary part of society that is founded on white supremacist principles. Within this framework, it is not surprising to find that the history of education for African Americans is not a story of liberation and prosperity but one of struggle and disappointment. A critical race analysis of Black education starts from the notion that education, as we know it, was never intended to have liberatory consequences for African Americans. (p. 116).

Critical Race Theory provides a framework for the analysis of alternative perspectives that may be salient in the educational success and life outcomes of Black students. As Lynn wrote, “While prevailing explanations for the failure of minority students in schools have addressed issues of class, culture, and ethnicity, they have rarely examined fully the ‘race effects’ of school practices, policies, and structures” (p. 115). Critical race theory values the lived experiences, knowledge, and voices of marginalized people. In the effort to have meaningful improvements in the educational outcomes for Black males, CRT asserts that it is essential to listen to and engage those who have experienced and have been victimized by endemic racist practices and structures. Careful consideration of the voices and experiences of Black teachers may provide invaluable insights into the conditions, practices, and pedagogy that support Black male achievement.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this qualitative study, the researcher sought to explore Black teachers' perceptions regarding the factors that impact Black male achievement in elementary schools in rural Georgia. Qualitative researchers often seek to understand and interpret how people make sense of, engage in, and grapple with the world around them. Qualitative research is an inquiry approach in which the researcher 1) explores a central phenomenon, 2) asks participants questions and collects the views of participants, 3) analyzes and codes the data for description and themes, 4) interprets the meaning, 5) writes a final report (Creswell & Clark, n.d).

In Georgia, only about 55 percent of Black males graduate from high school (Schotts Foundation, 2015). Moreover, many Black males that attend rural school environments often face intensified educational challenges such as poverty, lack of diversity in school personnel and the limited availability of educational resources (Sampson, 2005; Sarrio, 2012). Although Black male students may face challenges in rural environments, some researchers have suggested that Black teachers may be effective with Black males due in part to their use of unique pedagogical techniques (Milner, 2006). Nevertheless, scholars have discussed that Black educators are often left out of the discussions regarding what is best for students of color (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1991; Milner, 2006; White, 2012).

Given that Black teachers comprise a relatively small percentage of the practicing educators in Georgia, their personal stories of their world and their interpretation of the “educational world” in which Black males receive their schooling may not have garnered much attention from educational researchers and educational practitioners.

Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, and Jennings (2010) indicated that Black teachers generally express positive beliefs about Black students, advocate for them and demonstrate “Cultural Connectedness” in regards to working with Black students. Because of these factors and other potential connections, the researcher believed that it would be very beneficial to solicit the voices of Black teachers who are successful in promoting Black male academic achievement as well as developing positive relations with Black males. Black educators not only work with Black male students intimately on a day to day basis, but because they also work closely with non-Black teachers, they are familiar with how Black male students and non-Black teachers interact. The participants’ experiences, perceptions and thoughts regarding Black male achievement may provide school administrators and leaders with critical knowledge that can be beneficial in their efforts to the initiate procedures, strategies, and programs to improve the academic achievement of Black males.

Bell (2002) discussed that there has been renewed emphasis on listening to the voices of teachers and hearing their stories. Scholars conducting qualitative research may use a narrative approach to study and interpret stories of life experiences (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). Thus, stories can be examined and analyzed to demonstrate how voices are silenced or contradictory to dominant perspectives (Creswell, 2007). Bell (2002) indicated that this requires going beyond simply telling stories, but it requires “an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates” p. 208. Creswell stated that narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories of life experiences of a small number of people. A narrative approach allows researchers to present complex and rich experiences of participants. Therefore, the researcher used a narrative approach to gather critical insights from Black teachers regarding

their experiences and their perceptions of Black male academic achievement in elementary schools in rural Georgia.

Research Questions

This study's primary research question was: What are the perceptions of Black teachers on the academic achievement of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia? Through conducting this study, the researcher sought to address the following sub-questions. 1) What impact do Black teachers perceive attending elementary school in a rural environment has on the academic achievement of Black males? 2) What impact do Black teachers perceive school curriculum, policies and practices have on the academic achievement of Black males? 3) What impact do Black teachers perceive teacher demographics have on the academic achievement of Black males? 4) What interventions, strategies, and messages do Black teachers think are effective in improving academic achievement of Black males?

Research Design

Critical race method of counter-storytelling. CRT seeks to explore how students and teachers work to resist and overcome these educational barriers (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Taylor, Gillborn, Ladson-Billings, 2009). Edward Taylor discussed the significance of CRT's use of counter stories to challenge dominant educational narratives and notions of meritocracy. Taylor wrote:

Counter storytelling and narrative serve as a pedagogical tool that allows educators to better understand the experiences of their students of color through deliberative and mindful listening techniques. Learning to listen to these stories and figuring out how to make them matter in the educational system is potentially invigorating and validating. (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 10)

Gloria Ladson-Billings discussed how the voices of people of color are needed in order to have deeper understanding of the educational system. She indicated that Black teachers are often frustrated from having their voices silenced and being left out of the dialogue about how to educate Black children (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Lisa Delpit (1995) discussed the critical role that teachers can have in any effort to improve the quality of education occurring in schools. She wrote:

Teachers are in an ideal position to play this role, to attempt to get all of the issues on the table in order to initiate true dialogue. This can only be done, however, by seeking out those whose perspectives may differ most, by learning to give their words complete attention, by understanding one's own power, even if that power stems merely from being in the majority, by being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of color, and to listen, no, to hear what they say. (p. 47)

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define counter story as method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told. Counter stories seek to challenge dominant discourse and further the struggle for racial reform. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) assert that critical writers use counter stories to challenge and displace pernicious narratives and beliefs. They discuss that many victims of discrimination often suffer in silence and blame themselves. Through counter stories, these victims have a context in which their voices can be heard and the discrimination can be named and combatted. These scholars suggest that powerfully written stories or counter narratives can be effective in impacting traditional systems of beliefs. By considering neglected evidence of those who have been silenced, readers can be reminded of our common humanity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Huber (2008) indicated that critical race counter stories can be used as powerful tools to challenge majoritarian stories that justify social inequities and

normalize white superiority. Huber also stated that the counter stories can reveal the realities of racism and other forms of subordination experienced by people of color (2008). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) assert that counter stories are created from a) data gathered from the research process itself, b) the existing literature on the topic, c) our own professional experiences, and d) our own personal experiences. Proponents of critical race theory believe that the insights gained from studying the voices, struggles, and lives of Black teachers can be used to promote positive growth in the Black males (Kohli, 2008). Utilizing focus group discussions, this qualitative study attempted to explore the experiences and perceptions of Black teachers and illuminate their counter stories regarding the academic achievement of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia.

Instrumentation

The researcher used a focus group discussion as the primary method of collecting the perceptions of Black teachers regarding the academic achievement of African American males in Elementary School in rural Georgia. Creswell (2007) stated:

Focus groups are advantageous when interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with other, when time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information. (p. 133).

Focus Groups - Focus groups are often used as means of generating conversation and discussion regarding specific topics. Focus group interviews allow researchers to develop deeper insights into how participants think. Through group interaction and non-verbal communication, researchers are able to gain more understanding of the phenomena being studied (Nagle & Williams, n.d). The main objective of focus group interviews is to describe and understand

meanings and interpretations of a select group of people to gain an understanding of a specific issue from the perspective of the participants of the group (Liamputtong, 2011). Usually, focus group interviews involve six to eight participants who have similar social and cultural backgrounds. Under the guidance of a facilitator or moderator, participants may engage in dynamic discussions on specific issues or concerns. Focus group participants are encouraged to share their thoughts, perspectives, and experiences in non-threatening environments. A primary goal of focus group interview is to help the participants feel comfortable to share opinions and beliefs without fear of being judged or ridiculed. More so than with an interview with an individual, the focus group setting allows the research to study the interaction with participants. Through the dialogue, debate, and group dynamics of participants, the researcher may be able to glean vantages and important themes that may not have occurred in a one-on-one interview. Also, focus groups may serve as a catalyst for the discovery of similar lived experiences and perceptions among group members. Focus groups can be valuable in allowing the participants to voice opinions that may be different because the group dynamic provides more insulation to participants given that multiple persons are engaged in the discussion. Some researchers have stated that minority teachers often feel a strong push to “conform” to prevailing norms and values or face some punitive consequences. The focus group setting allows Black educators to share their experiences with race and racism. It also could allow them to share strategies for addressing racism in the educational setting (Kohli, 2009).

Focus Group Questions - Liamputtong (2011) suggested that the primary aim of the focus group is describe and understand meaning and interpretations of a particular group of people regarding a specific issue. Focus group participants are chosen because it is believed that they can provide valuable insight into the research questions. Focus group interviews involve people

from similar social and cultural backgrounds who have similar experiences or concern. The success of the focus group discussion depends on the establishment of a permissive and non-threatening environment where participants are comfortable with sharing the opinions and experiences without fear of judgment or ridicule (Liamputtong, 2011). Cheng (2014) discussed that a focus group allows participants to converse in a comfortable way. Cheng discussed that focus groups could vary regarding size but may be hard to moderate if too large. Citing Krueger (1998) and Krueger and Kasey (2000), Cheng stated focus group interviews should comply with specific principles. Among to the principles, Cheng (2014) included:

- 1) Questions are understandable by participants.
- 2) Questions are clear and simple.
- 3) Questions are as colloquial as daily conversations.
- 4) Questions can be easily recited.
- 5) Questions should be open-end. (p. 383)

Cheng also discussed that the focus group interview should be structured to establish participants' connection with the topic. In addition, Cheng suggested that focus group questions should progress from introductory questions to more specific questions designed to focus participants on the research question(s). This study used open-ended questions (See Appendix D) that were constructed based on the research questions and review of the literature in Chapter Two.

Sampling

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of Black teachers regarding the academic achievement of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia. Purposeful sampling is intended to enhance understanding of the selected individuals or groups'

experiences. With purposeful sampling, researchers seek information rich individuals or groups that can provide the greatest insight into the research question (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Creswell (2007) stated “This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Given that the researcher is a Black male who grew up, attended K-12 schools and began his educational career in rural middle Georgia, he has been deeply concerned about the educational experiences and outcomes for Black male students in rural Georgia. Accordingly, the researcher used a purposeful sampling strategy in the effort to identify potential teacher participants at three elementary schools in rural Georgia. The three schools that were selected for this are described below.

Sites

Appleton Elementary

Appleton Elementary School (Pseudonym) is a Title I school located approximately 75 miles from Atlanta, Georgia. The county in which Appleton Elementary is situated has a population of approximately 20,000. The per capita income within the county is less than 35000 dollars. During 2014-2015 school year, Appleton Elementary had approximate 640 students enrolled in the school. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch during that year was 79%. The percentage of students classified as Students with Disabilities was approximately 15%. The demographics for ethnicity of the student population during that year were: Black - 39%; White – 45%; Hispanic – 11%; Multiracial – 4%. During the 2014-2015 school year, Appleton Elementary had 44 teachers consisting of 29 White teachers, 15 Black teachers. In regards to teacher’s experience, Appleton had 29 teachers with more than ten or more years of experience. Appleton had 15 teachers with ten years or less of experience.

Bakersfield Elementary

Bakersfield Elementary School (Pseudonym) is Title I school located approximately 100 miles from Atlanta, Georgia. The county in which the school is situated has a population of less than 10,000. The per capita income within the county is less than 25000 dollars. During 2014-2015 school year, Bakersfield had approximately 435 students enrolled in the school. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch during that year was 100%. The percentage of students classified as Students with Disabilities was approximately 12%. The demographics for ethnicity of the student population during that year were: Black - 97%; White – 2%; Multiracial – 1%. During the 2014-2015 school year, Bakersfield Elementary had 25 teachers consisting of 2 White teachers, 20 Black teachers and 3 Asian teachers. In regards to teacher's experience, Bakersfield had 2 teachers with ten or more years of experience years of experience. Bakersfield had 18 teachers with ten years or less of experience.

Open Valley Elementary

Open Valley Elementary is a Title I school located approximately 75 miles from Atlanta, Georgia. The county in which school is situated has a population of approximately 15,000. The per capita income within the county is less than 45000 dollars. During 2014-2015 school year, Open Valley Elementary had approximately 469 students enrolled in the school. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch during that year was 99%. The percentage of students classified as Limited English Proficient was 10%. The percentage of students classified as Students with Disabilities was approximately 11%. The demographics for ethnicity of the student population during that year were: Black - 75%; White – 6%; Hispanic – 16%; Multiracial – 1%. During the 2014-2015 school year, Open Valley Elementary had 30 teachers of consisting of 13 White teachers, 15 Black teachers and 3 Hispanic teachers. In regards to teacher's experience,

Open Valley had 15 teachers ten or more years of experience. Open Valley had 15 teachers with ten years or less of experience.

Participants

After receiving IRB approval and district approval, the researcher contacted the principals of Appleton Elementary School, Bakersfield Elementary School and Open Valley Elementary School. The principals were informed of the purpose of study. The researcher asked the principals of the three elementary schools to provide a list of all teachers in his or her school who met the following criteria: 1) High academic achievement of Black males in the teacher's classroom on standardized summative assessments; 2) The teacher's ability to demonstrate care and develop positive relations with his or her Black male students. Once the researcher received the lists of potential participants from the three elementary schools, he emailed the potential participants to inform them of the study. Each potential participant received an introduction letter (See Appendix B) from the researcher that communicated the purpose of the study. The letter informed potential participants that their involvement in the study was strictly voluntary. The potential participants were also informed of the steps that the researcher would take to protect their confidentiality.

- 1) Access to digital audio files will be password protected with a secure passcode.
- 2) Pseudonyms will be assigned for each participant in the study as well their schools.
- 3) Digital recording device (iPad) will be kept locked in secure file cabinet in the researcher's home.
- 4) Focus discussion transcriptions secured on researcher's personal computer with password protection to prevent unauthorized users.
- 5) Audio files, notes and transcriptions will be destroyed after three years.

The letter asked those teachers who self-identified as being Black to participate in the study. The participants were asked to commit to a focus group discussion that may last between 90 to 120 minutes. A total of fourteen teachers from the three schools indicated their willingness to participate in the study. Appleton Elementary had a total of five participants. Bakersfield Elementary had a total of two participants. Open Valley Elementary had a total of seven participants. At request of the participants, the focus group sessions were scheduled at the participants' schools. Two focus group sessions were scheduled at Appleton Elementary out of convenience to the participants. Therefore, one focus session consisted of three participants from Appleton and the other focus session consisted of two participants from Appleton. The researcher scheduled the focus group discussions at times that were convenient for the participants of each school. Several days prior to the focus group discussion, the participants were sent a Participant Profile document that allows each participant to share his or her biographical and educational information with the researcher. This also allowed participants to share aspects of their educational philosophy and beliefs regarding Black males that may not have been captured during the focus discussions.

According to the participant profiles, most of the participants indicated that their socio-economic status growing up was middle class. Ten of the fourteen participants grew up in a rural community and attended K-12 school in rural Georgia. Eight of the fourteen participants currently work in the same county in which they attended elementary school. As high school and college students, many of the participants had participated in sports and had been members of various honor and civic organizations. The educational experience of the participants ranged from two years of experience to 24 years of experience. In regards to education attainment, four of the participants had Specialist degrees. Four of the participants had obtained the degree of

Masters. Six of the participants had the degree of Bachelors. Most of the participants indicated that they always had aspirations of becoming a teacher. A couple of the participants had entered education through alternative certification routes. Several of the teachers had been selected as Teacher of the Year at their respective schools. Table 1 provides brief information on each participant's experience and education.

Table 1

Participant Information

| NAME | AGE | DEGREE | EXPERIENCE | SCHOOL | GRADE/SUBJECT |
|----------|-----|------------|------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rose | 41 | Bachelors | 15 years | Appleton | Kindergarten – 5 th Grade ART |
| Nadia | 43 | Masters | 19 years | Appleton | Pre-K – 4 TH Grade All Subjects |
| Kevin | 27 | Masters | 2 years | Appleton | Kindergarten All Subjects |
| Timothy | 36 | Masters | 8 years | Appleton | 4 th & 5 th Grade Social-Studies |
| Shanelle | 37 | Masters | 13 years | Appleton | Kindergarten & 5 th Grade Social-Studies |
| Rafe | 34 | Bachelors | 10 years | Bakersfield | Kindergarten – 5 th Grade All Subjects |
| Kendra | 28 | Bachelors | 3 years | Bakersfield | 5 th Grade Reading & English |
| Loretta | 43 | Specialist | 19 years | Union Sky | 3 rd grade English/Language Arts |
| Tamara | 46 | Specialist | 24 years | Open Valley | Kindergarten – 5 th Grade All Subjects |
| Chelsea | 29 | Bachelors | 5 years | Open Valley | Pre-K - Kindergarten All subjects |
| Monique | 25 | Bachelors | 3 years | Open Valley | 2 nd Grade All Subjects |
| Jalesia | 24 | Bachelors | 2 years | Open Valley | Pre-K and kindergarten |
| Renee | 39 | Specialist | 8 years | Open Valley | Pre-K, K All subjects |
| Barbara | 32 | Specialist | 8 years | Open Valley | 3 rd , 4 th & 6 th All Subjects |

Data Collection

The primary method of collecting data was through a focus group interview with the researcher and teacher participants. An informed consent document was provided to all potential participants at the time of the focus group sessions. The participants were asked questions that allowed them to share their experiences, challenges, perceptions regarding the achievement of Black male students. They were encouraged to share their stories. During the focus group discussions, the researcher took notes in the effort to capture significant moments and points of emphasis during the sessions. Additional questions were asked when appropriate to clarify understanding. All of the focus group sessions were digitally recorded with an iPad. The researcher created an abridged transcript of the audio recording. In this process, the researcher identified and transcribed significant portions of the audio recording into word documents (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, Zoran, 2009). Notes and observational data were transcribed into word documents (Doody et al., 2013). All data collected in the study was stored on the researcher's personal computer. The computer is accessed only through use of a secured password. The confidentiality of participants was protected through the use of pseudonyms for schools and participants. None of the data collected in the study will be accessible to others besides the researcher and committee members.

Data Analysis

The researcher began the data analysis through a process of familiarizing himself with all the data gathered in the study. This familiarization process involved listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts multiple times. Dilshad & Latif (2013) advocated examining for big ideas, considering words and context of use, and examining the strength of participants' feelings. The analysis of the data from the focus group discussions involved many steps. Using a general

inductive approach (Thomas, 2006), the researcher used constant comparison as an analytical technique to analyze the data collected from the focus groups. Constant comparison was first used in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) but was also used with focus group data (Doody et al., 2013). Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) discussed that there are three major stages which characterize constant comparison analysis. Open coding is used in the first stage. This entails the process to break down the data into smaller units. Consequently, the researcher will write memos in the margins of the text in the form of short phrases, ideas, or concepts that arise from the text (Doody et al., 2013). The researcher will identify distinct concepts or categories. The researcher will attach a descriptor or code to each unit. Axial coding is the second stage. During this stage, the initial codes are grouped into categories. Special attention will be given to capturing each participant's voice through notating significant quotes or experiences. The final stage is selective coding. During this stage, the researcher will seek to develop one or more themes that express the content of each group. Subsequently, the researcher will compare the statements, experiences, and perceptions of all the participants to identify and highlight any common themes that emerged from all of the participants. Doody and colleagues indicated that constant comparison is beneficial when there are several focus groups within the same study. They indicated that focus group data are analyzed one group at a time enabling the researcher to use the multiple groups to compare the themes that emerged from the various groups. This process assists the researcher in reaching data saturation (Doody et al., 2013; Onwuegbuzie et al, 2009).

Critical race theory analysis. Critical race methodology was used in this study to explore the perceptions of Black teachers on the educational achievement of Black males in rural Georgia. Lisa Delpit (1995) discussed how people of color have grown skeptical of traditional

methods of research as pertaining to Blacks. She wrote, “Academic research has, after all, found us genetically inferior, culturally deprived, and verbally deficient” (p. 31). Researchers of CRT attempt to give voice to the marginalized, expose injustices, and affect positive change (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008). Critical Race Theory uses racial analysis to develop a deeper understanding of the educational barriers encountered by people of color. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) identified five central elements that form the basic framework of Critical Race Theory in education: 1) Critical race theory asserts the centrality of race and racism while acknowledging that race and racism frequently intersect with other forms of subordination such as class, gender, and immigrant status. 2) Critical race theory challenges the dominant ideology of educational institutions. Critical race theorists reject the claims from education institutions and schools that they operate based on neutrality, meritocracy, and colorblindness. Instead, CRT challenges White privilege and exposes deficit-informed research that silences people of color. 3) Critical race theory has a commitment to social justice. CRT seeks to offer a liberatory or transformative response to racial oppression. 4) Critical race theory insists upon recognizing the experiential knowledge of people of color as legitimate and critical to understanding and analyzing racial subordination. 5) Critical race theory emphasizes the use of interdisciplinary perspectives. Accordingly, critical race theory in education seeks to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects that maintain positions of racial subordination and domination in the classrooms (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine Black teachers' perceptions of the academic achievement of Black male students in elementary schools in rural Georgia. This study sought to explore the primary research question: What are the perceptions of Black teachers on the academic achievement of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia? The following sub-questions were addressed: 1) what impact do Black teachers perceive attending elementary school in a rural environment have on the academic achievement of Black males? 2) What impact do Black teachers perceive school curriculum, policies and practices have on the academic achievement of Black males? 3) What impact do Black teachers perceive teacher demographics have on the academic achievement of Black males? 4) What interventions, strategies, and messages do Black teachers think are effective in improving academic achievement of Black males?

This chapter is divided up in three major sections. The first section provides general descriptions of each of the fourteen teacher participants. The second section provides an overview of how the findings are organized. In the third section, the findings are presented.

The Sites

The study involved fourteen teachers from three rural elementary schools in rural Georgia. Appleton Elementary School has 640 students and a total of 44 teachers. Five teachers from Appleton Elementary School participated in this study. Bakersfield Elementary has 435 students and a total of 25 teachers. Two teachers from Bakersfield Elementary School participated in the study. Open Valley Elementary School has 469 students and a total of 30

teachers. Seven teachers from Open Valley participated in this study. The next section provides descriptions of each participant.

The Participants

Appleton Elementary Teachers

Shanelle. Shanelle is 37 years old. She has a total of thirteen years of experience at Appleton Elementary School. As young child, Shanelle grew up and attended kindergarten through 12th grade in the schools in the same rural community in which she now teaches. As a lover of music and performance, Shanelle participated in chorus and band while in high school. She also participated in regional and state literary competitions. She was recognized and awarded for her musical performances and her academic achievement in high school as well as college. Shanelle indicated that she has known that she wanted to be a teacher since she was nine years old. Many of her early experiences were significant in shaping her educational perspective. She recalled memories of “playing school” with her cousins. Also, she shared her memory about one of her former teachers who refused to yell at students. Because this particular teacher’s demeanor was very positive, soft spoken and calm, students had to listen attentively in class. In addition, she recalled memories of a paddling she received for not having a reading book. Shanelle also share that she remembered the impact of seeing a teacher give “her absolute best to teach us despite of our behavior.” Describing the incident, Shanelle stated:

I remember one day, she got so angry with us because of our behavior, that she hit her hand on her desk and sprang her wrist, all because of trying to get us to settle down. It was then that I saw her passion for this field. It was then, that I began to pay attention, and I can remember going to her and telling her not to give up. She poured out to me and my friend and I could see that she was ready to throw in the towel. She was a good teacher, and it was her classroom that I chose to go back to when I had to observe a class during my formal education. You have to have a heart for this field in order to survive.

Shanelle indicated that she wanted to become a teacher because she wanted to go into a profession that would help change lives. She said, “What better way to affect the future of our nation than through teaching. I love learning and I want my students to have the same love for learning as I do.”

Kevin. Kevin is 27 years old. He has two years of teaching experience. He currently teaches kindergarten at Appleton Elementary. Because of his father being in the Armed Forces, Kevin attended multiple K-12 schools in Georgia and outside of the United States. Kevin participated in JROTC Drill and Rifle teams while in high school. He finished high school as an honor graduate. In college, Kevin was a member of political party organizations, Organizations for Black Educators, and the Honor society. In discussing educators, Kevin mentioned three teachers who impacted his educational perspective. Kevin wrote:

Mr. Williams (Pseudonym) was my 7th grade World History teacher and my first African American male educator. Mr. Williams was a no-nonsense type of person, who held all his students to high standards. What drew me to Mr. Williams was that he was so hard on me. At the time, I was a gifted student that lacked discipline and only did enough to get by. Mr. Williams would not let me do just the bare minimal, not only did he require more out of me as a student but also I was held to higher standards than my peers. At the time, being eleven, I would protest about how unfair he was and that he was mean. It took me five years to understand that he wanted me to realize my potential and that to maximize that potential I needed to be disciplined and steadfast in my academic endeavors.

Kevin also reflected on how two Black female teachers helped him understand the importance of education to the survival of the Black community. He wrote:

Both women had seen how the educational system at the time had failed Black boys and in many instances exacerbated problems that the educational system is supposed to address. Both women also made it very clear to their African American boys that our education was the most prized thing that we had in this world, and the only thing no one could take from us. I still remember to this day, ten years later, the quote Mrs. Peters (Pseudonym) would say every day in her deep raspy voice before she would start her math lesson: “Success doesn’t come to you...you go to it.” – Marva Collins. She wanted me to understand that my success depended on my willingness to go claim it and my ability to claim “success” significantly depended on my educational achievements.

Kevin discussed the reason he chose to become a teacher. He stated:

I became an educator because I saw the difference that I could have on a Black boy if he could walk into a class and see a teacher that looked like him. Also for many of our children, I am the only positive role model that they are exposed to on a consistent basis.

Kevin indicated that he strives to help all of his students, especially Black males, understand that they have the ability to accomplish their dreams.

Timothy. Timothy is 36 years old. He has been teaching at Appleton Elementary for seven years. Currently, he is teaching fourth grade social-studies. He grew up and attended kindergarten through 12th grade in the schools in the rural community in which he currently works. In high school, Timothy was a multisport athlete, playing football, baseball, basketball and track. When he went to college, he also played football and baseball. Timothy shared a significant moment in life as a young student that impacted him. He stated:

I heard a coach say to another coach in front of me “that boy won’t even graduate from high school.” That comment about me in front of me really impacted my life because I was determined to prove him wrong. The thought of knowing they felt that way about me was heartbreaking.

Timothy had initially worked in the hospitality industry. Timothy indicated that he had not considered becoming a teacher. However, he said:

Teaching chose me. I didn’t choose it. Everything I have been through in life was preparing me to be a teacher. Now that I teach I just believe that it’s the best profession ever. I love it. That’s why I know it is God.

Timothy shared that he loved the fact that he can be a positive influence on so many children in the elementary school setting. He still participates in sports and enjoys teaching children horseback riding.

Nadia. Nadia is 43 years old. She has 19 years of teaching experience. Currently, she is teaching fourth grade mathematics at Appleton Elementary School. She has taught in several different counties ranging from rural to suburban. She grew up and went to school in a highly

populated metropolitan city in Georgia. As a high school student, Nadia was a member of the Beta club and the National Honor Society. Recalling her experience in high school, Nadia indicated that she did not receive much guidance and support from her high school counselor regarding her future, therefore, she resolved to be more independent and “think for myself as far as my future after high school was concerned.” Nadia also shared an experience that occurred in high school that impacted her teaching perspectives. She shared:

I remember that there was a girl in high school that had difficulty reading in front of a crowd. And the teacher belittled her and it pissed me off. And I said, “I’ll do it” and I read her passage. And her whole demeanor changed. And I decided that I was going to do education because I don’t want to be the one that makes you feel bad because of something you can’t do.

Nadia indicated that she decided to become a teacher because of the influence of her great grandmother. She wrote, “My great grandmother was an educator for over 30 years and she was inspirational to me growing up.” Among the distinctions that Nadia has received as an educator is being named Teacher of the Year at different schools.

Rose. Rose is 41 years old. She has 15 years of teaching experience. Currently, she is teaching art at Appleton Elementary School. Rose grew up and went to school in the community in which she now teaches. While in high school, Rose participated in multiple sports including softball, basketball, track, cross-country. She received numerous awards in sports and well as recognitions for academic performance. In college, Rose was also very active participating in intramural sports, the Black Student Alliance, and a historical Black Greek Letter Organization. Rose reflected positively about her early teachers but shared one troubling experience. Rose wrote:

I also had good teachers, but I had a bad experience. I remember getting popped on my hand with a ruler because I got a problem wrong. One of the reasons I became a teacher is because I wanted to find fun ways that students could learn math and other subjects. I

wanted students to feel comfortable asking questions or asking for help if they don't know something.

Rose indicated that both positive and negative role models impacted her decision to become a teacher. She shared, "My community helped me and I wanted to give back." She expressed fond memories of how teachers positively impacted her with their warm greetings, their smiles, and their willingness to work with her one on one. Rose said, "But my main reason for teaching is I wanted to come back to my county to give back because I had a lot of people who took time and gave back to me, including my community."

Bakersfield Elementary School

Kendra. Kendra is 28 years old. She has a total of three years of experience at Bakersfield Elementary School. She currently teaches 5th grade Reading and ELA. Kendra grew up and went to school in the community in which she currently teaches. In high school, she was a member of the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA). As a college student, she was a part of the National Honors Society and received recognitions for her academic performance. When she reflected on significant events during her early schooling years, she shared that developing the love of reading was very important to her educational perspectives. She said, "I really enjoyed having educators and parents who supported my love of reading and they encouraged my development as a student who wasn't 'thrilled' about sports but the intellectual activities." Kendra spoke highly regarding the influence of her elementary school teacher, Mrs. Lexington (Pseudonym). She wrote:

She held high expectations for my learning and encouraged me to be competitive academically. In addition, she reassured me that it was okay to compete with others on an intellectual level and to not become a statistic of society. I grew into a young adult who wanted to become successful similar to Mrs. Lexington and to continuously improve upon my learning skills.

Kendra spoke of her desire to use teaching as a platform to inspire students to believe that they can overcome their personal circumstance through education. Kendra shared, “I got into education because I wanted to try to make a difference in students’ lives and help them to see the potential that they have, based on experiences of me being in school and not always having teachers who saw potential in me.”

Rafe. Rafe is 34 years old. He has ten years of teaching experience. He teaches students with disabilities in grades kindergarten through fifth. He grew up and attended grade school in a rural county in middle Georgia. He has been teaching at Bakersfield Elementary school for 10 years. As a young child, he lived in a predominately Black community in a rural town in Georgia. The section of town in which he was raised was about 90% Black with little variation. In high school, Rafe was highly involved in athletics. He participated in football, track, tennis, and wrestling. He received numerous athletic awards for performance and dedication while in high school. He was also recognized as a member of the Honor Society for Social Studies. In addition, he was a member of FCA and the Beta Club. As a young Black male growing up in a rural community, Rafe recalled several educators who were instrumental in his development. For Rafe, these teachers were influential and imparted key life lessons that are very important to him. He shared his memory of one of his early education teacher, Mrs. Granderson (Pseudonym) and the impact she had on him. He shared:

I remember her to this day. I was around three or four years old, I can still recall how she cared for me and loved children. I can use those memories as a testament to how unknowingly children need nurturing and care, even in a learning institution. The hierarchy of needs vary from child to child, depending on what they are lacking or need. Providing them with these attributes can help with development of a child on a holistic level.

Rafe also described the positive impact that athletics had on his life and well as the lives of his peers. Rafe shared that he saw teachers and coaches go beyond their respective titles to provide young Black males with structure, guidance and support. Mr. Rafe stated:

I have encountered a few coaches and academic teachers who operated under the confines of their positions, while playing the role of father to youth that were without. There were teachers who invested time and energy, outside the classroom who made a profound impact on me when in high school and college.

Mr. Rafe identified and recalled the impact of several coaches. He shared:

Coach Clayborn (Pseudonym) in high school taught me good citizenship on and off the field. I learned that there are some nice and kindhearted White people in the world. Also, Coach Lambert (Pseudonym) was our athletic trainer. He was our FCA leader and director for our school. I always enjoyed his approach to Christ and how He would treat others regardless of background, ethnicity, or creed.

Rafe believed that his decision to become a teacher and his involvement in athletics was divinely ordained. He stated:

I knew that the Lord placed something in me that allowed me to relate to kids and connect physical activity with it. Which is why, I have a Bachelors in P.E. Special Education is currently the field that I'm working in and I am enjoying it. It's rewarding to see children progress and see the look on their faces when they overcome a challenge and realize the potential from within.

Open Valley Elementary School

Chelsea. Chelsea is 29 years old. She has five years of teaching experience. She has taught PreK and kindergarten. She currently is teaching Pre-K at Open Valley Elementary. She also grew up in the county in which she currently works. As a high school student, Chelsea was very involved with various activities and organizations. She was on the basketball team and was a member of the Beta club and yearbook committee. She was recognized in high school by her classmates as being the "Best all-around". Chelsea indicated that she did not like math when she began high school. However, because of the influence of her 9th grade algebra teacher, she began to enjoy math. Chelsea believed that this teacher was successful because she engaged her

students in activities that were fun and interesting. As a result, Chelsea developed a love for math and intimate understanding of how a teacher could become successful in reaching her students who may not have been engaged or connected to the instruction prior. Chelsea would later apply some of the same principles when she began as a teacher. In recalling her initial year of teaching, Chelsea reflected on one of the students in her class: She said:

A significant event that has impacted my development and perspectives on education occurred my first year of teaching. I had this one challenging student that I had a hard time reaching at the beginning of the school year. He did not like coming to school, when he arrived he was all over the place. By 2nd semester of school the student made a big change. He loved school and loved learning because I was able to reach him where he was.

Chelsea stated that she decided to become a teacher “because I love to help others. I realized the need of students in the community I am from and decided to change my career path, to be a positive asset to the community to help the students.”

Renee. Renee is 39 years old. She has eight years of teaching experience. She has taught Pre-K through 5th grade. She is currently teaching kindergarten at Open Valley Elementary. She grew up in rural counties in Middle Georgia. She graduated from the county in which currently teaches school. As a child, Renee grew up in foster care. As a high school student, she was on the honor roll and in the Honor Society. She participated in organizations such as the Future Business Leaders of America and the Junior ROTC. She also participated in the Pep Squad. During her high school years, Renee became pregnant. She recalled the support and encouragement of one of her teachers, Mrs. Jackson (Pseudonym), during that time. Renee stated that Mrs. Jackson told her “honey you’re not the first girl to have a baby in school. It is not over for you. Get focused and stay focused”. Despite the fact that she became pregnant while in school, Renee still graduated in the top 10% of her graduating class.

As a child, Renee said that many educators inspired and encouraged her. Renee indicated that she decided to become a teacher because of the positive impact that these teachers had on her life. She said, “I wanted to give back to students. While growing up in foster care, there were so many teachers who encouraged me that I wanted to do the same to kids with similar socioeconomic statuses.”

Barbara. Barbara is 32 years old. She has a total of eight years of teaching experience. She has taught all subjects in grades third, fourth, and sixth. Currently, she is teaching 3rd and 4th grade. Unlike other participants, Barbara is not a native of Georgia. She was born in and received her early education in one of the West South Central States. Education has had constant presence in Barbara’s life. Barbara stated that as young student she always looked up to her teachers. She shared:

School was always home away from home. My teachers were always very nice and wise. They shared facts about themselves and always said that an education equals opportunities. As a student, I always believed what my teachers told me and this particular saying stuck with me.

Receiving an education was important within her family. Barbara said that there was an unspoken expectation that all her siblings would graduate from high school. However, she indicated that she was not pushed to attend college. Instead, she said her desire to attend college was an intrinsic and self-motivated goal. Barbara stated that she knew that she would eventually attend a major University within her state. As a high school student, Barbara received a Martin Luther King Jr. Scholar award. After high school, she reached her goal and enrolled in the major University within her state that she had set as her goal. During college, she was involved in civic organizations and was also in the LAE/SP educator’s program. During her college years, she

received the Tom Joyner HBCU scholarship. When reflecting on teachers who had a positive impact on her, Barbara recalled several teachers that exuded characteristics of persistence and resilience. Barbara shared her memories of teachers who never listened to “I can’t do it” and others who “never took no for an answer.” She mentioned teachers who “always pushed us to do our best as well as how to become independent learners.” She spoke of high school teachers who were cool and made learning fun and worthwhile. She also shared memories of teachers who “helped me to realize that I really could do anything that I put my mind to.” She described how many teachers may overlook the powerful impact that they have on children. She stated:

Oftentimes, as teachers, we get wrapped up in teaching the standards and testing that we don’t realize when we’re making a difference in a child’s life. Something as small as smiling or giving a child a hug can do wonders for a student. I believe that ALL students can learn. They may not all learn at the same rate but they can learn.

Barbara indicated the reason she became a teacher was her desire to make a difference in the lives of children.

Tamara. Tamara is 46 years old. She has a total of 24 years of teaching experience. She currently teaches fifth grade at Open Valley Elementary School. Tamara was born in a state in the Northeastern portion of the United States. She received her early education in urban and suburban communities in Georgia. As a high school student, she was a member of the drill team. While attending college, Tamara became involved in several professional education organizations. In addition, she became a member of a Black Greek Letter Organization. She indicated that she was selected as Miss Homecoming while in college. Teaching was not the initial career ambition for Tamara. In describing how she how decided upon teaching, she stated,

“Actually I did not want to become a teacher. I wanted to work with the United Nations and eventually become an Ambassador. My dad asked me to be a teacher, so here I am...a teacher.”

Tamara indicated that she believe that dedication and persistence are the key ingredients for success for teachers.

Loretta. Loretta is 43 years old. She has a total of 19 years of teaching experience. She is currently teaching third grade at Open Valley Elementary School. Loretta grew up and attended grades K- 12 in a rural community. During her high school years, she was actively involved in her church tutoring younger students and singing in her church’s choirs. In college, she was a member of a Black Greek Letter Organization. She was also recognized for her academic achievement. Loretta indicated that decision to become a teacher was highly impacted by her experiences with her third grade and high school English teacher. Loretta stated:

I have always wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember. I had aunts who were teachers and I wanted to be like them. The most profound moment for me was when I was in third grade. My third grade teacher at the time seemed stern but fair and my high school English teacher was sweet and nurturing.

Reflecting on her accomplishments as an educator, Loretta wrote:

I knew I could make a difference in a child's life. I wanted to be able to give back and through teaching, I have found that it is both rewarding and challenging. Just by knowing the impact that I make on children whether it is academically in the classroom or outside in the real world, is fulfilling for me.

Monique. Monique is 25 years old. She has been teaching at Open Valley Elementary for three years. She currently teaches second grade. She grew up in rural county in Middle Georgia. As young student, Monique was very active in multiple organizations. She was a member of Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA). She was also member of a step team in her community. In addition, Monique was on her high school’s basketball team. In college, Monique continued her involvement in sports playing on intramural flag football and

basketball teams. She became a member of historically Black Greek Letter Organization during college and was in an honor society. She graduated college Magna Cum Laude. Monique indicated that she decided to become a teacher because of the powerful impact her third grade teacher had on her life. Monique recalled how her third grade teacher interacted with students and promoted learning. She said:

The thing I remember the most is the relationship she built with each individual student in the classroom. No matter what the behavior issue may have been, we were all treated fairly and equally in her classroom. I also remember her making sure learning was engaging and fun. There were times that we didn't know we were learning, but we were.

In referring to this teacher's influence, Monique wrote, "The way that she changed my life or impacted my life, I wanted to have that same impact on student learning. I realized that this was truly my passion. I wanted to help children learn."

Jalesia. Jalesia is 24 years old. She has been teaching at Open Valley Elementary for two years. She currently teaches kindergarten. She grew up and attended school in the same rural community in which she now teaches. While in high school, she was a member of the Beta Club. When she was in college, she participating in a program in which she volunteered to tutor elementary school students. She was also a member of the Student Professional Association for Georgia Educators. When she was in college she made the dean's lists numerous times. In reflection on her youth, Jalesia acknowledged that she did not like school until she was in the fourth grade. She credits her teacher, Mrs. Headley (Pseudonym) with positively impacting her life. Jalesia stated, "More than her teaching abilities, I liked her because she genuinely cared. She made learning fun and easy." Jalesia also recalled her recognition that some educators may not be effective as others. She stated, "It was not until I got older and went to college that I realized the impact that an ineffective teacher could have on you. I realized that there were so many teachers who were impacting kids negatively by not teaching them." With this recognition and

the reflection of how she was able to positively impact students that she tutored while in high school, Jalesia determined that education and teaching would be her career.

Data Organization

The following section of this chapter provides the findings from the focus group discussions. It is organized based on the common themes that emerged as the participants responded to the questions. The goal of this particular format is to include all salient points and perspectives regarding the common themes or topics that developed during the discussions. As numerous topics arose during the discussions, there were natural variances in participant engagement with and connection to the certain topics. In other words, every participant may not have had experiences with every specific topic discussed. Therefore, they may have chosen not to share their perspective on the subject at hand. Likewise, some participants may have had strong opinions, experiences, or beliefs about certain subjects that arose as opposed to others. Consequently, their voice may appear to dominate a particular theme or subheading. Therefore, the section will not include the voices of every participant under every theme. Ultimately, the primary purpose of this section is to provide to the reader a sense of the natural flow of the focus group discussions capturing the salient points, disagreements and perspectives of all focus groups. In doing so, the researcher strives to provide in a single layout the themes, experiences and counter stories addressing the four research sub questions.

Attending Elementary School in Rural Environments

What impact do Black teachers perceive attending elementary school in a rural environment have on the academic achievement of Black males?

A critical focus of this study was to hear the teachers reflect on the rural environment in which Black males attended elementary school. In the effort to center the discussion on the rural

environment and Black male students, the focus discussions began with questions specifically about the benefits and challenges that teachers perceived were present in their rural community. This following section provides the teachers' perceptions. Since most of the participants had personal experiences growing up, living and working in a rural environment, they had much to share regarding the impact of the rural environment on Black males. They saw the rural environment offering Black male students the benefits of offering a sense of community, safety and easier access to parents and family. They also identified negative aspects such as the lack of exposure, poverty and lack of needed resources.

Rural Environment Benefits

Sense of community. Many of the teachers discussed various positive benefits for Black males living in a rural community and attending a rural elementary school. Notably, several of the teachers indicated that there is greater knowledge of and familiarity not only with the Black male students but also with their parents and extended family members. Accordingly, the teachers articulated that there was a "Sense of Community" in the rural environment that went beyond the walls of the school. The teachers indicated the "closeness" of the rural community facilitated multiple non-school related interactions with students and family members. Several teachers mentioned there was a high likelihood that teachers would see students and parents in locations such as church, the grocery stores, banks, or at community events. Tamara from Open Valley Elementary mentioned the closeness of the small town. She said:

Some of the things Black males have to face in bigger cities you don't have to face in smaller towns. With it being a small town we work so closely together to take care of that child. But I was just thinking about the benefits. I would think it would be the small town, just the closeness, looking out for someone else, another child. Whether it is the teacher, the parent, the neighbor, somebody is looking out for the children.

Kevin from Appleton Elementary discussed how the social support that Black males receive in rural communities can be better than the support that Black males receive in more urban environments. He shared his story of initially wanting to teach in the city. He stated:

I had the desire to be in the inner city schools at one time. But when I saw some of the problems, I knew personally that I don't think that I could have helped them deal with some of those issues I saw. Here, there is a bigger social safety net with families. If I go to the Rec on a Wednesday night to a football game I am bound to run into one of my students or one of those Black males playing out there on the football field. And the mom will say, "How is he doing in school?" There is easier access to those parents and that's the benefit that I see, just that social safety net. When you are in the inner city, there is a disconnect.

The teachers saw this increased frequency of interactions as important in establishing positive relationships with the students and their parents. Kendra in Bakersfield Elementary discussed this as well. She stated, "The positive aspects are, in rural areas, you have more of a close knit community. It feels more like a family versus just teaching random students. So they learn to care for you and listen to you." Also, Rafe from Bakersfield Elementary concurred stating:

Growing up in a small rural area does promote comradery. It does promote cohesion between the student, the family and the school. A lot of the people that are teaching at school now are a product of the community. They have a much deeper connection or direct connection with the students' parents whether they were classmates, taught their parents, or etc. So it is easier to make that connection. There are family oriented values to pass along. It is more of a care community. You got people who know your families. They care more about you inside and outside of classroom so that builds morale.

Safety. Another benefit of the rural environment was the perceived safety as compared to more urban environments. Many teachers indicated that attending a rural school in a rural community was better for Black males, in terms of safety. Renee from Open Valley Elementary County shared, "Some of the things that Black males have to face in bigger cities you don't have in smaller towns. You don't really see many gangs in a small town. I think that is a benefit." In the Appleton Elementary focus discussion, Shanelle also talked about the lack of violence in the rural school. She said,

There is not as much violence in the schools in rural areas as it is in the cities. And not as much opportunity to be exposed to some of the things you see on the nightly news that kids, in the inner city schools, have been exposed to. It is not to say that we don't have our share of problems because we do. But I just think it is not on the level that it is in bigger cities and inner city schools.

Monique discussed that within their rural community, the school often serves as a place of stability for Black males. She stated:

I think another benefit for them attending a rural school would also be because they face so many situations and they go through so much, being able to have a place to go that is orderly and they know what to expect when they get here. Just removing them from those situations that they are facing at home...Being able to get them from those situations and just having eight hours of peace or normality is also a benefit for Black males in this area.

Negative Aspects of Rural Environment

Although several positive attributes of rural schools were mentioned during the focus discussions, the teachers in the current study also identified certain negative aspects of attending school in rural environments.

Lack of Exposure. The lack of exposure to opportunities beyond the rural environment for Black males attending school in a rural community was a major area of discussion during the focus groups. Many participants felt that the rural environment provided limited opportunities for Black males to see and experience how their lives might advance and be improved. Many participants felt that the lack of exposure disadvantaged Black males significantly. In referring to the rural environment and Black males, Nadia said:

It's what they know. It's what they see. It's where they've grown up. It's their comfort zone. So do they have an option to not be in that particular environment, because you have to go school in your particular area? So it is just what they know.

Nadia believed that having appropriate exposure was critical to assisting Black males in particular and rural students in general to envisioning broader success. The lack of getting out of or seeing beyond the rural community was perceived as limiting some aspirations for Black

males. In the Bakersfield's discussion, Rafe discussed a certain way of thinking that he has noticed in the rural community that may limit Black males from optimizing their potential. He stated:

There is a small minded mentality in small rural community where you don't have much money, background or exposure. When you don't know any better. Until you know better you can't do better. Some don't believe you can do and some don't have that desire to do better. The small minded mentality is like a carryover trait into the lifestyles. There are definitely some positive and some negatives and they both impact the academics of young Black males.

For Rafe, the intersection of poverty and the lack of appropriate exposure resulted in students developing a way of thinking that negatively impacted Black males' lifestyle and their future aspirations. Rafe viewed this as a mentality that perpetuated complacency. Similarly, in the Appleton discussion, Shanelle talked about how she has taught several Black males that rarely had the opportunity to go to places outside of their community. She stated:

I have talked to a lot of young Black males that honestly have not been outside of the town so their prior knowledge that they come to my classroom with is very limited. Apart from the fieldtrips that we take them on at school, that's as far as they go. So I definitely think that the exposure definitely plays a part in terms of them being here and going to school in a rural area. But also for the students that want to take their abilities, whether it athletic or in the arts, a lot of times you don't have scouts to come to small towns to see the talents of these students. You know they have to go to the big city in order to get that exposure.

After reflecting on Shanelle's discussion of students having limited exposure opportunities in rural environments, Timothy recalled one of his Black male students who had exceptional skills in the performing arts. He stated:

Let me piggyback on the exposure. Just like recently, our kids did a play. A lot of those kids who were the main characters in the play, they were behavior issue kids. Probably 85 to 95 percent of the main characters were behavior issues kids. Those kids would benefit from a performing arts school. Can we provide that? No! Because I know a few of those kids who would excel in a performing arts school. One kid, when they were auctioning for their parts, this kid scored a perfect score in every category: he scored a perfect score in singing; he scored a perfect score in acting. Perfect, across the board!

And I really think a performing art schools would cause that kid, that particular kid to excel in life. But being in the rural area, can we actually provide that for them?

Timothy asserted that several of Black males who were the lead actors were considered behavior problems. For Timothy, their behavior was impacted by the school system's inability to provide a consistent learning environment where their performing talents could be channeled positively. Timothy believed that the rural school was unable to create and financially support this type of learning environment for these students. In discussing exposure, Nadia discussed how teachers may take for granted that all students may have had enriching experiences outside of the school to support their academic and social development. She recalled a conversation that she had with her college advisor and subsequent experience as a teacher:

I will never forget when I was student teaching and I did a unit with something about a circus. One of my professors (at the University) grilled me saying, "You can't talk about circus because every child has not had that experience. They don't know what that is."...So now you have to think about some of the things that we take for granted that we actually do with our children and we expose them to, some kids have never. We would even take fieldtrips from (our rural town) to Atlanta, and some of the kids were like, "where are we?" "What do you mean? It's just downtown Atlanta? You haven't been here? You are just 50 minutes away!" And it is just unreal! So it just the exposure of what you get in certain non-rural neighborhoods that you don't receive or things you don't get.

As Rose listened to Nadia's story about students not getting out of their small town, it reminded her of her own personal experience as a student growing up in a rural community and attending a rural school. She stated:

One of my things when I was a child was I didn't go anywhere. The first time I ever went to Atlanta, I was in college. And I remember riding on a bus. We were going to an ethnic conference with Jada Pinkett and a lot of other people. We were on the bus and I was like, "where are all those people going?" And (my peers on the bus) were like "What are you talking about? And I am thinking "Look at all those people walking on the street! What is going on?" And they were like, "This is every day!" But that was the first time that I experienced that. But I was in college...Because my momma stays in one little box. She does not like to go out of her comfort zone. She would not let me go anywhere. (In high school, I played basketball, softball, and ran track)...because that was a way for me getting out....I almost cried when I polled students in my class. I have students in my class that never have been to the national park within our county. We have students

coming from everywhere to go to our national park in our county. And students that live in this community have never been.

Rose' discussion of her own personal experience of rarely leaving the rural community when she was a young student suggests that many other students in the rural community may have the same experience. Given that the lack of exposure to things beyond their rural surrounding was mentioned by teachers in all three counties, this suggests that the teachers believe exposure is a critical factor that impacts Black male students.

Poverty and lack of resources. Some of the teachers discussed that poverty and lack of resources within the rural community negatively impacted Black males. Rafe discussed that "There are definitely some negatives: the lack of exposure, the lack of financial means to provide things, books." Shanelle and Timothy discussed, as previously mentioned, the inability of the school system to provide adequate resources to support music and arts programs. Kendra discussed how poverty hindered students and limited parental involvement. She stated:

I see the negative aspects especially with the poverty level. Many of the students don't have a lot parental involvement or support. A lot of the skills that they learn, not just academic skills but social, emotional, behavioral, they learn from us as being their teachers and their leaders. So, in some ways, it's negative.

Nadia discussed how finances and poverty are significant in regards to the lack of opportunities available to Black males in the rural environment. When discussing opportunities available, she stated:

I think they are scarce. It always goes back to money. In rural areas, it is harder to have the funds to do what you need to do. When you are in the other areas, you know you have better homes or more tax money comes in to provide things that are needed: more parental involvement – not to say that in rural environments parents are not involved because they are. It is just that financially, they may not be able to do as much as you could in another environment.

Rural Environment Summary

Four major themes emerged from the participants' discussion on the impact of the rural environment on Black males: 1) Sense of Community, 2) Safety, 3) Lack of Exposure, & 4) Poverty/ Lack of Resources. The teachers in all focus groups discussions indicated that there was a sense of community present in their rural environments that benefited Black males. Teachers discussed concepts such as "Going beyond the walls of the school" to develop relationships with students and their families. The terms "family" and "values" were used in the discussions at all three sites. The perception that the closeness or proximity of the rural community would inevitably result in frequent interactions between the students, teacher, and parent was pervasive. These perceptions of the rural environment have been documented by some researchers. In her research of rural schools, Alice Sampson (2005) discussed that rural schools often reflect the positive values of the community. Sampson indicated that rural schools tend to promote closeness or connectedness of school staff and students. Similarly, Hardre, Sullivan, and Roberts (2008) indicated that rural schools tend to promote caring. Some of the participants asserted that they perceived that the rural school and rural environment were safer for Black males than more urban environments. Kevin suggested that he perceived the rural environment had more people around the Black male to provide a "social safety net". The perceived safety of the rural schools and the access to students and parents were viewed as positive factors of attending school in rural environments. When discussing how Black males may be negatively impacted by going to school in a rural environment, participants suggested that many Black males, as well as most other students within the rural school, lacked exposure to the world beyond their rural community. Other participants asserted that students in rural environments were severely impacted by the manifestations of poverty. Participants perceived that poverty had a significant

impact the students' aspirations, their family, and their school. Participants believed that poverty contributed greatly to the lack of exposure and constrained Black males' vision of what they could do or become. Some participants believed that poverty hindered parents from being as engaged or active in schools. Other participants asserted that the schools in their rural community could not provide adequate instructional supplies or programs to meet the diverse needs of the students. The statements and beliefs of the focus group participants regarding some of the challenges that Black males face in rural schools were consistent with the research on rural schooling. Hardre, Sullivan, and Roberts (2008) discussed how rural students lack exposure to employment opportunities in rural environment. Sarrio (2012) also discussed how rural schools are limited in their ability to provide various educational programs, academic courses and student support.

Curriculum, Policies & Practices

What impact do Black teachers perceive school curriculum, policies and practices have on the academic achievement of Black males?

The following sections will explore the participants' responses to questions that surrounding research sub-question: What impact do Black teachers perceive school curriculum, policies and practices have on the academic achievement of Black males? Addressing this research question, the various groups discussed the following topics: 1) Inadequate History, 2) Reading Challenges, 3) Academic Rigor, 4) Standardized Testing, 5) Gifted Program, 6) Promotion & Retention, 7) Special Education, and 8) Discipline. The researcher will provide a brief summary of emerging themes.

Curriculum and Instruction

Inadequate history. Multiple perceptions and beliefs regarding curriculum and instructional practices were discussed by the teachers at the three elementary schools. When the Appleton Elementary focus group began to discuss how curriculum and instructional practices impact Black males, Shanelle and Kevin expressed concerns that schools fail to teach students an adequate history of Black people and Black Americans. Kevin asserted that what is often taught in schools to Black students about their history communicated a negative message about their past, who they are currently, and what is to become of them in their future. Kevin stated:

In school we teach: our African-American history is limited to we came here in slavery, in chains; we struggled through the reconstruction and civil rights movement. So all we teach them is we struggled, we are going to continue to struggle, we are always going to struggle. We never teach them about the Marcus Garvey that said, "Let's go back to Africa."We don't hear that! What they hear is: "we came here in chains, we fought the Civil War, "you guys helped a little bit." Then we went through the reconstruction. Then you know we didn't have any history until about 1965, and then we started talking about the civil rights movement, and that is it! In the new history book, there might be a blurb about Barack, that's it! That's all they hear!

Kevin suggested that schools do not provide a more comprehensive history of Blacks because casting Black people in the negative imagery of continuously struggling plays into the dominant narrative of what it means to be Black in America. Shanelle discussed that it is important for her as a Black teacher to ensure that she tries to teach her students more inclusive history. She also explained why she felt it was important for Black students and Black males to learn their schools. She asserted:

I will say for me as a teacher, and I do mean to be, I am a little more protective of those kids that look like me. I give them all the same teaching, but I am going to definitely make sure that this child understands it. I am going to make sure that they understand their history. I also think if you want to keep a people from becoming empowered the way to do that is to keep them ignorant. Honestly, there a lot of young Black kids who do not know their accurate history because their parents do not know their history. Because the parents were only taught what is in the history books. Their parents were only taught what's in the history books. And a lot of them do not take the opportunity to learn just a little bit more about who they are. And they are satisfied about what has been taught to them as opposed to finding out just a little bit more. So we have a generation that just

satisfied about what is being taught. . . . But when I looked at the curriculum, I said this will give me the opportunity to teach history. Yes, going by the standards, but also by how it should be taught at the fifth grade level. Because our Black kids need to know that their ancestors contributed to the building of this country.

Reading challenges. Some of the teachers at Bakersfield Elementary and Appleton Elementary discussed reading as being a significant challenge for Black males in the elementary school. Kendra stated that young black males struggle with understanding text. Likewise, Rose discussed how she has experienced seeing students shut down in regards to reading text. Rose stated:

I have seen a lot of boys that I teach. I could be teaching one way but as soon as I give a quiz or ask a question, they will cry, they will break down, they are in tears. And when I talk to them it is because they have a hard time with the words. They have a hard time with reading. And that reading is what gets a lot of the males. Because it goes from every subject: you got to read in science, you got to read social studies, you got to read in every subject. Reading is what's attacking them.

Nadia discussed that part of the difficulty that Black males have with reading may stem from the differences between vocabulary that they are accustomed to using in their home and the vocabulary required or utilized in school assessments. Nadia stated:

To me, I just think that the vocabulary that's used in the home is totally different from the vocabulary that we are using at school. And in a rural community, pretty much everybody speaks the same. They may not have the same experiences but they speak the same. So when we are trying to incorporate this vocabulary for the lessons, these kids are not used to that. It's like "What are you talking about?"

Academic Rigor. Nadia also suggested that some practices that are implemented in lower grades do not necessarily prepare students for the more rigorous curriculum that they will be expected to learn and perform as they get older. For example, Nadia highlighted a teaching practice that is sometimes used to in lower grades regarding math. Nadia stated:

It's just like, I have an issue with the greater than or less than symbols. At the primary level, everybody wants to use alligators. "What are alligators?" Just call it what it is – greater than or less than. Just use what it is because when they get to the real world and the workforce, you are not going to say, "Well, you know the alligator ate the bigger

number.” We have to start speaking and have to be consistent with whatever vocabulary we are incorporating. It needs to go out throughout.

Similarly, Shanelle expressed concerns regarding her perceptions that educators and parents do not require Black males to engage in tasks that requires collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving. Accordingly, she suggested that Black male students may not be challenged properly to acquire the skills essential for their success. Shanelle stated:

I personally think that we pacify the kids too much. I think that we give them way too much. And I think that it is perpetuated from home to school. They don't have to wait for anything. They don't have to work for anything. If they sit there and you ask them a question, and they wait too long, we just give them the answer. Because we are ready to move on! Anything that is difficult on their part, if they sit up there and pitch a fit, even at home or school, depending on the teacher that they have,the adult will just give the kid what they want.

Curriculum and Instruction Summary

The three themes that emerged from the discussion curriculum and instruction were 1) Inadequate History, 2) Reading Challenges, and 3) Academic Rigor Concerns. Kevin and Shanelle expressed their perception that the school curriculum does not provide an adequate and accurate history of Blacks in United States. Kevin suggested Black history taught in schools is very limited and often casts an image of Blacks being continuously dominated. To Kevin and Shanelle, history or social-studies curriculum tend to provide only a cursory overview or no coverage of historical periods and Black leaders who challenged the dominant narrative. These teachers believed that that Black students, and Black males, in particular, suffered because they could not see themselves in curriculum. Therefore, these teachers indicated that they take it upon themselves to “go beyond the curriculum” to teach their students, especially their Black students lessons that provide a more inclusive view of the accomplishments of Blacks in America and the world.

The theme of Reading Challenges for Black males also emerged from the discussions. Teachers discussed how they had observed Black males struggle with vocabulary and understanding text. According to the teachers, they have observed that some Black male students would become frustrated with reading various assignments and may shut down because of reading difficulty. Some teachers suggested that vocabulary that the students use at home may be different from the vocabulary required at school. As a result, these students may find various school assignments that emphasize vocabulary and reading challenging.

Several teachers voiced their concerns regarding the level of rigor expected from Black male students and the rigor in the academic assignments that are given to Black males in elementary schools. Teachers believed that some Black males may not be challenged to maximize and develop their academic skills. Teachers suggested that some teachers may have low expectations for Black male students and do not make the effort to move them beyond the minimum level of performance. To these teachers, as the students moved up to higher grades in the elementary school, the Black males may not have been properly prepared to engage in rigorous assignments and tasks.

Academic Policies and Practices

Standardized testing. Some participants voiced concerns regarding standardized testing practices that are utilized in elementary schools. The use of standardized testing is common in almost every school at every level in the United States. Testing is used to determine mastery of standards, intellectual aptitude, placements in gifted programs, special education, and promotion and retention. However, some of the teachers in the focus discussions suggested that standardized tests may be problematic. Nadia expressed frustration with the amount of testing that is required for children in the elementary school. She said “We test them to death!” When

asked to elaborate, she commented, “Every time you turn around we are having a test. And this test determines whether they can go here or they can do that.” Rose also discussed her thoughts about testing and how it may be used to set up groups and student tracking. Rose said,

But I don’t know if y’all have seen the tee shirt that I wear. It says, “A child is more than a test score.” And a lot of them are very creative in other ways. And it feels like they only get rewarded for how they do on a test. It is just like testing is what moves them up or down levels. That literally puts them in groups. But you are saying that “we are not putting them in groups.” But testing is putting them in groups and they don’t really like that....It can be unfair. But they are testing all the time.

When asked directly if testing is fair, Nadia asserted that there were ulterior motives behind testing. Nadia stated:

Testing to me is set up by the government to push one down and bring another one up. Because they know that certain kids are going to be exposed to more and will have more advantages.

Gifted program. The sentiment that testing creates division or separation was suggested by other teachers when they discussed the gifted program at their school. Shanelle stated:

When we look at academic policies, I know that there is a different dynamic in the gifted program as opposed to regular ed. program and inclusion classroom...I am talking about the student demographics. When you are talking about the makeup of the kids in terms of Black, White, Asian, or Hispanics: It is not because they are not just as smart as their counterparts but maybe they did not pass the creativity part. Or maybe they passed the creativity part but they did not pass some other part that kept them out of those advanced classes or doing the other things that they see these students taking part in.

Similar to Nadia, Shanelle raised the question if there were ulterior motives in regards to the gifted program’s implementation. When asked if the gifted policies and procedures were fair, Shanelle stated:

It is unfair! They purposefully are set up like that. It is just like: take for example, the whole (placement) of poll tax on voters a long time ago. They put it on there because they knew people couldn’t afford to pay it. The same thing I feel goes toward more Black kids qualifying for the gifted program. I have some very smart kids in my classroom that deserve to be in that program! But they are not there because “oh, they didn’t pass such and such. They missed it by a few points.” But then you have others, and I see their

scores. Some of the kids that are in my class are out performing those kids. But they are in the gifted program and my kids aren't.

Timothy concurred with Shanelle, making the suggestion that all students that are in the gifted program did not qualify based upon the stated criteria. Timothy commented:

I would have to say unfair because of what I see going on. And what I see going is that gifted program. Everybody in that gifted program did not qualify to be in the gifted program. I know this for a fact! I had two White students that scores came up short in one area. Mom called the school raising sand about the gifted program and why they did not make it. Both of their parents called about that particular program. They put those kids in the gifted program. They did not qualify to be there!

Shanelle suggested that adherence to the gifted program admittance policies may vary based on school administration. She stated:

I think with the gifted program it depends on administration and how stern they are in following the policies that are in place to either put in or keep the kid out of the gifted program. And here is my thing: I feel like what they do for one, they need to do for all!

Listening to the discussion regarding admittance to the gifted program, Kevin commented that “studies have shown that African Americans don't necessarily do very well on standardized tests. So you can have students in your room that are gifted but not necessarily a test taker. They don't necessarily take it seriously.” When Kevin was asked if standardized testing was fair, he shared his thoughts about opportunities lost because of not qualifying. He stated:

Well, they are unfair but particularly when you are talking about gifted. When you talk about fast-tracking them on an academic curriculum, this child may not just because this child can't sit there and take a test and perform on a test.

When asked what they thought was the purpose of the gifted program, Shanelle commented:

It seems to me that it is exclusive. I honestly wish that across the board....they need to do away with the whole gifted program....I have seen kids, how they feel about themselves, after they don't get into the gifted program. It's like it's something to aspire to, and if you don't get in, it is like you are not good enough. It wrecks havoc on your self-esteem. The great thing is kids are resilient and they bounce back. But it takes them a while. But here you are left with a kid feeling like they weren't good enough. But in actuality, you were; it's just you didn't make whatever score they thought you should make to go to this particular classroom.

In a separate focus discussion Nadia voiced similar sentiments regarding testing and the gifted program's purpose at the elementary school's level. Nadia suggested that teachers play a major role in testing and who ultimately gets into the gifted program. She stated that the testing criteria were opinionated. She said, "And teachers can sway it one way or the other. So it depends on the relationship with that particular child" She further stated:

I don't believe in gifted in the elementary, primary or middle school, because it doesn't count. What is the point? To say my child is better than yours. All those records do what when you go to the high school? You start from zero. So it should not be an issue.

Nadia suggested that Black boys are often not considered for gifted program by the teachers. She stated:

They are overlooked for gifted. Is it that they don't want to be bothered with them? They think that they are an issue? I have no idea why they don't....But going back to the young Black males and the gifted, I just don't see them being referred for the gifted program. Every African American child that I have is in the special education program on a (RTI) tier level.

Even though she observed very few Black males being referred for the gifted program, Nadia asserted that she makes an effort to push her talented Black males into the program. She stated, "...If you came to me as a Black male, I am going to push your behind and you are going to get in." Whereas the teachers in Appleton Elementary expressed concerns about smart Black children not being considered for the gifted program, teachers in Open Valley Elementary expressed concern whether the Black male students identified as gifted in their school were maximizing their academic potential. Monique questioned whether students were truly "gifted" or just smart students. Tamara shared that some of her students in the gifted program were not being creative but they wanted to be recognized with the "gifted" title. Monique indicated that she holds high expectations for her gifted Black males and she makes them live up to her vision of what gifted learners should be. For Monique and other teachers, the gifted students should

engage in activities that require thinking out of the box, higher-order reasoning, and problem-solving. Monique stated:

I think my Black males meet that qualification because I make them. Because I teach second grade I have to plan the activities for them. Because I plan for it to be that way, then they do it. It is not that they come to me and say this is the project we are going to do. I say “higher level students, this is the project that you are going to do.” (Monique, p.4)

Promotion and retention. Questions regarding the effectiveness of promotion and retention policies generated much discussion in the various focus groups. In the Bakersfield Elementary discussion, Rafe indicated his belief that in the past schools may have moved Black males up without them having acquired the requisite skills needed for success. He stated:

...a lot of males got through school, but when they got through with school, what could they do? They did not learn anything? They got pushed along. There were a lot of academic gaps that weren't identified. They got pushed along and now they are unprepared for life. They are unprepared for work. They don't have the drive to go to postsecondary education or technical school.

Kendra discussed that policies such as No Child Left Behind failed to promote greater achievement for Black males. She said:

With No Child Left Behind, a lot of the Black males were getting left behind. I think the concept was great because we don't want to leave any student behind. We want to make sure that they exceed and excel. But the actual implementation some of the students were just being pushed along. A lot of the rigor of policies that were set in place was difficult for some the males.

Rafe indicated that there were some positive aspects to NCLB. He felt that the policy promoted a greater awareness of students' deficiencies. He wrote:

The positive of NCLB is we can now identify what are their weaknesses. Procedures are in place now where you have to pass the state assessments or you are retained. Now they can get a better grasp of the concepts covered. These procedures help to ensure that there is some type of comprehension and growth...I think the policies that are in place now are more helpful than hindering. Because we can identify what they have a weakness in and we can focus on that before they go to the next grade so they will be more prepared.

In the Appleton Elementary discussion, Timothy voiced his concerns about how promotion and retention policies were highly contingent upon standardized tests. He stated:

Since I have been in education I've heard that the single most important thing to education is that classroom teacher....But it depends on a standardized test...Let it depend on that classroom teacher that you are bragging on. Let it depend on that classroom teacher you are saying is the single most important factor to education...Let promotion and retention depend on them then. And not a standardized test.

Timothy asserted that teachers should have more input or be the determining factor in promotion or retention decisions. In the Open Valley Elementary discussion, teachers initially indicated their general agreement that retention in the fifth grade does not help Black males. Tamara stated:

I think retention as they get older, it does not help them. I think the policy of retaining them does not help. For instance with our fifth grade class this year, and it is a lot of those students who really need to be retained. I don't know if that will help them or we need to find something else that would help them.

Renee discussed a practice that they had incorporated the previous year when in the deliberations of promotion or retention decisions. She indicated that the teachers would try to determine a professional consensus on what was in the best interest of the student. Renee said that they would ask:

“Is it going to help them to get it again?” If not, then we placed them on. If it was going to help them, if they are just slow learners or if they need a little bit more of it, then, yes, keep them.

Subsequently, the teachers contemplated what would happen to the Black male student if he is placed in the sixth grade into Middle School instead of being promoted. Tamara asked, “But what would help them then as they go on to the middle school? Is this trend going to keep on happening?” Upon pondering this question, Barbara and Renee discussed what they, as teachers, would have to do to make sure students acquire the skills and concepts to be successful and

promoted to the next grade level. Renee stated, “We got to make sure that we are getting them ready for y’all. Barbara stated, “It starts with us.”

Special Education and remediation. Some of the teachers voiced concerns regarding their perception that Black males comprised the majority of students that are in special education in their elementary school. Shanelle asserted that special education is overpopulated with Black males. Shanelle stated, “So I am saying to myself, no one has said anything about the number of Black males that are in the Special Education classroom. What are we doing to alleviate some of that?” Similarly, Nadia says instead of being referred for gifted, Black males are frequently placed in remedial courses. Nadia commented, “Every African American child that I have is in the special education program or on a tier level.”

Some of the teachers at Open Valley Elementary felt that young Black males may not be aware of negative connotations regarding placement in special education or the potential impact of lower academic performance. Renee stated:

I think in lower grades they don’t know of the impact. It is when they become older, some 2nd maybe, but definitely 3rd, 4th, or 5th, where the peers that they started out with have gone on and they are still behind.

Monique said that some students may begin to understand the practice of grade retention and special education placement while in the 2nd grade. However, she indicated that most students in the second grade do not understand the significance of these actions. She said:

I think they do begin to realize it in the 2nd grade. But not to where they shut down. And that is with special education as well. They just realize that “oh, I am getting pulled in this group. They are going to read to me.” I don’t think it set in that (it is special Ed.) That is something totally different or that I am getting lower work. I don’t think that realization has set in in 2nd grade.

Loretta indicated that she thought that students begin to understand concepts of retention and special education placement around third grade. However, Renee indicated that even in the fifth

grade some Black males do not understand what it means. She stated, “I don’t think it has set in in the 5th grade. I think they may know that they are getting extra help. I don’t think they know that you need to work really harder to test out of Special Education.” However Barbara shared her experience that some students become aware of negative stigma and isolation of special education pull-outs in second grade. Barbara indicated that these students became self-conscious and did not want to be pulled from their regular classes. Barbara informed the group, “There may be some that know. Because we have a couple in the fourth grade who blatantly refuse if I tell them that they are getting pulled out. And they say ‘I am not going with you.’” Tamara posed the question to her peers of how can special education be made positive. She asked:

What can we do to make it positive? Like Special Ed. I think special education in some cases will help young African American males, if we are dedicated to it We have to be dedicated, like, “I want him to succeed! Do you get what I am saying?”

When asked to elaborate on what she meant about dedication, Tamara said:

We are dedicated. But when I say we, I mean teachers as a whole. In the real world, I do want to believe that all teachers are dedicated. But I don’t know if all teachers are dedicated. I don’t know...

Academic Policies and Practices Summary

The major themes that emerged were 1) Standardized Testing, 2) Gifted Program, 3) Promotion & Retention, 4) Special Education. The teachers expressed concerns regarding the school’s reliance on standardized testing. They shared that elementary students were tested excessively. They expressed their beliefs about standardized testing being unfair. Some teachers communicated their perception that standardized testing leads to unfair tracking. Other teachers asserted that the testing often leads to certain groups of students who are successful at testing receiving more advantageous academic support and opportunities. Consequently, teachers

perceived that students who are unsuccessful at testing may be relegated to less rigorous academic tracks and potentially receive less access to adequate academic support. Offering an example of what they perceived as unfair testing, teachers from Appleton Elementary discussed their concerns about how students are admitted to the gifted program. For these teachers, they believed the program's was unfair and subjective. They perceived that students were sometimes admitted based upon their parent's influence. Teachers felt that Black males were frequently overlooked and not considered for gifted program. Although they expressed frustration with the admittance criteria of the gifted program, they recognized the benefits for the students that were admitted. Consequently, some of the teachers indicated that they worked to make sure that Black males who were academically talented were admitted. Teachers at Open Valley Elementary discussed their efforts to ensure that the Black males in their gifted program were engaging in problem-solving and higher-order thinking activities.

Teachers also shared their views regarding promotion and retention. Teachers at Bakersfield believed, in the past, that Black males may have been promoted or placed in grades without having the necessary academic skills for success. They indicated now there was greater professional knowledge and accountability regarding student's academic standing including strengths and weaknesses. Teachers at Open Valley questioned whether retention practices actually helped or harmed Black males. They believed as Black males got into the upper elementary grades the retention did not have benefits. Many teachers discussed concern regarding Black males making up a large percentage of the special needs population at their school. Teachers reiterated their perception that Black male students in the special education program may not receive the academic support that will enable them to exit the program. Instead, they may be relegated to lower academic tracks as they move through school. Some teachers

expressed that Black males in elementary school were not aware of the academic and social implications of special education. However, the teachers expressed that as they age Black males become acutely aware of the isolation of the special education programs and the Black males begin to resist or express their displeasure regarding these programs.

Discipline Policies and Practices

At Open Valley Elementary when the teachers discussed the impact of discipline policies and practices, many of the teachers believed that discipline was challenging for Black male students. Renee voiced her opinion that some Black males often engage in power struggles with adults regarding behavior expectations in the school. Renee commented that some Black male students may not want to adhere to expectations of the adults in school and comply with rules. After general consensus that behavior was problematic, some teachers questioned whether discipline policies were fair for Black males. Teachers commented that discipline consequences were often administered inconsistently with students. Therefore, students may have not have understood and learned the severity of their action and the importance of adhering to suggested behavioral expectations. Monique stated:

I also think that the lack of those consequences then makes the behavior more severe. Because if I feel like something light is going to happen, or last time, something light happened, then I just keep doing the same thing because I know the consequence doesn't get any more severe. No matter how many times I do it, it is the same. I get one day of ISS. I will do it again.

In addition, some teachers indicated that that they perceived that different consequences had sometimes been administered based on the race of the student. Teachers believed that as Black boys see inconsistent consequences they may not understand and may develop disregard of adhering to expectations. Teachers believed that boys may become unconcerned about potential negative consequences and more willing to engage in negative behavior because of their

perception of consequences being minor and tolerable. Teachers at Open Valley Elementary said that the school needs to be consistent and specific about discipline consequences. For them, consistency was viewed to promote accountability for students, parents, and teachers.

Very similar to Open Valley Elementary, teachers at Appleton Elementary also expressed that discipline consequences may vary. Kevin talked about his level of tolerance for behavior that young boys engage in. Kevin suggested that his peers may not have the same tolerance level. Kevin who teaches kindergarten stated:

Also, I have a higher threshold. Something that some people get mad about, I don't. Because they are boys or some of them are rough girls. They are children at the end of the day. It is something new, it's more structure. So even though they know the expectations and there are rules, I do give leeway because of their age, because they are getting used to an educational setting. And, just because... I was a male that was very rambunctious and all over the place. So I can relate to that. It is not necessarily that I am trying to be defiant, sometimes it's just boring! And you have to do it. It is something that we have to do. Their attention wavers. And they want to do other things. I have more compassion or I should say I have a better understanding. I know where they are coming from being so young and being a Black male.

Kevin shared that his fellow teachers often will send him their problematic boys when the teachers reached a point of frustration with the male students. When the students are sent to Kevin, he indicated that he places them with his other students. He said, "Sometimes when you walk in there, it's two or three, and they just fall into the rotation. Because they know; they come to visit on a normal basis." Kevin believed that his tolerance was due to his personal experience as young Black male student in elementary school. Kevin shared:

I can remember going to school and getting in trouble because I wouldn't sit in my seat. And that brings back memories sometimes just of how harsh like... "I am going to the detention room just because I couldn't sit in my seat" Just for that infraction! I remember that! Was there really a need for me to go to the detention room for 15 minutes? Or could she have allowed me to stand up 15 minutes and do my work. Or whatever it may be to try to figure it out, as long as I get it done?

Kevin referred to this memory of the childhood incident as being significant lesson in how he manages his young students in his classroom. Shanelle said that she also has more tolerance but she emphasized the importance of Black boys developing more self-control of behaviors as they move up grades to curtail possible negative consequences as they get older. Being a fifth grade teacher, Shanelle stated:

I can say that definitely I had little bit more tolerance of certain behaviors when they were at the kindergarten level than I do at the fifth grade level. Because I feel like five years later, you ought to have a little bit more self-control over yourself and the choices that you make. Because one of the things I preach to my students all the time is, "And at some point if you don't learn how to control yourself, lack of being able to control yourself is going to end up in you being somewhere you don't want to be.

Shanelle indicated that she has tolerance for activeness or Black males needing to move. She said she often utilizes strategies such as planned ignoring when students engage in attention-seeking behaviors. She added that establishing a relationship with the students also helped with managing behavior. But, Shanelle also indicated that she will raise her voice with students at times to command their attention and compliance when she felt it was necessary. Like Kevin and Shanelle, Timothy expressed his tolerance for movement but Timothy asserted that noise disruptions would not be tolerated in his classroom. Timothy shared:

In reference to discipline in my classroom, some things are just non-negotiable. Kids standing up, can't sit down, I don't care about that. Just do your assignments and learn. But the tapping, that is non-negotiable! (Focus group laughs) But let me tell you why it non-negotiable. That's non-negotiable because I have 25 other students who are trying to learn and you are distracting them from doing what they need to do. And that's why that part is non-negotiable!

Timothy shared that he attempts to establish clear behavior expectations at the beginning of the school year. Timothy called his initial establishment of expectations to students as his "Come to Jesus" meeting. In this meeting students become acquainted with the expectations for behaviors in Timothy's classroom. Because Timothy felt that discipline at elementary school was

inconsistent, he asserted that his class expectations and management of students was crucial for academic achievement.

When discussing discipline, Nadia indicated that patience was very important. She felt that some teachers have less tolerance for Black boys and will refer them to the office or detention room more frequently. Nadia shared:

I think it depends on your patience. Some teachers don't have patience. Something they can do in my classroom and I am like "whatever." I may pull them to the side and say, "boy, you better sit your behind down somewhere, get it together!" Whereas you go to someone else, and they immediately give them a strike. And sometimes our young males get a disadvantage because some teachers don't have patience to deal with anything. You can do one simple little thing and they will write you up for it!

In regards to discipline practices, Rose stated that she sometimes does things "totally different from what other teachers do." She said that the teachers may tell her to write up children but she prefers to give warning and discuss the incidents with the child. Rose stated:

I feel that I am different from other teachers. They are straight by the book. But I like to talk to my students and figure what's going on. I like to talk to parents and let them know. I would like to talk to a parent before I write a child up. But you got to try to figure out what is going on with a student. I tell my students to make good choices. Because it doesn't look good when you are sent up to the office or you have been suspended.

Similar to the reflections of the teachers in Appleton Elementary and Open Valley Elementary, Kendra and Rafe at Bakersfield Elementary discussed the importance of consistent discipline practices. Rafe said that he works diligently ensure that students learn the value of discipline in his classroom and in the school in general. He stated:

I drill that into my students every single day. And it went from one class to another classroom until it got the whole grade level in which I am teaching under the same control. It teaches them discipline on a lifestyle aspect. I have always been an advocate if you follow the rules in school, you will follow the rules in the real world. If you break the rules in school, you will break the rules in the real world. And those reprimands and those consequences get worse as you get older. And that is why I am on my students so hard.

Similar to discussions in Appleton Elementary and Open Valley Elementary, Kendra felt that there were inconsistent discipline practices in Bakersfield Elementary school. Kendra also believed that inconsistency of discipline practices negatively impacts Black males lessening their respect for the law and teachers. Kendra voiced:

I feel that our students need to know how to respect their teachers, their parents, and the law. And there are consequences for doing things wrong. And they have to learn that early on because they are losing respect for elders. I think we do need discipline policies but they have to be consistent. They have to be effective.

Discipline Policies and Practices Summary

Teachers in each focus group brought up the topic of discipline practices and policies. One of the themes that emerged in the discussions was intolerance. Kevin asserted the importance of patience and tolerance with Black boys. He, as well as other participants, expressed that they have received Black males from other non-Black teachers when the teachers reached a point of frustration with the students. The participants suggested that non-Black teachers sometimes are less tolerant of Black males in regards to behavior. Teachers in Appleton expressed their tolerance for Black males feeling the need to move as long as the movement was not disruptive. Another major theme that emerged in the discussions around discipline was inconsistency. In Open Sky elementary, the teachers felt that Black males engaged in “power struggles” regarding behavior expectations. To the teachers from all three schools, Black male students received mixed messages about behavior because the consequences that students received for infractions were varied and inconsistent. Some teachers shared their perceptions that discipline consequences varied sometimes based upon the student’s race. Teachers from Bakersfield felt that inconsistency and the lack of discipline may result in young Black males learning negative lessons and losing respect for authority. The teachers believed that schools needed to provide consistency and structure. These teachers felt that the more Black males see

consistency and structure the less likely the students will make negative decisions that may have detrimental consequences in their lives.

Reflections on Race

What impact do Black teachers perceive teacher demographics have on the academic achievement of Black males?

Communication, care and relationships. The majority of the teacher participants in all of the focus groups indicated that a teacher's race was important in educating Black male students. Shanelle believed that many Black teachers have personal experience and knowledge of how Black males are brought up. And because of this knowledge, Shanelle felt that Black teachers could communicate with Black students in manner that White teachers may not necessarily be able to communicate with Black students. She believed that Black parents usually do not have any issues with the way Black teachers communicate with their children. However, she indicated if the same things were said by a White teacher to Black kids, the kids and parents may not be as receptive. Shanelle stated:

And a lot of times, there are just certain things that we can say to our Black kids that we would never be able to say to our White kids and get away with it. Just like there are certain things a White teacher can say to a Black kid and they will go home and tell their mother. But I can go and say the same thing to the Black kid, and I won't hear anything else about it. But I think that just the mere fact that you are Black sometimes builds a rapport with the kids and with the parents. And I have had several parents to come and, just because I am Black woman, they feel comfortable to talk to me about certain stuff. I think that race plays a very important role. I think that it is healthy for them to see someone that looks like them in a position of leadership and professionalism.

According to Kevin, some of the White teachers that he works with feel that he can relate better to the Black males than they can. Kevin also indicated that he can say things that get Black males' attention and cause them respond positively or comply with his expectations. He shared:

As I was telling you how I end up with some of the "troubled" children. That lets me know, by default, there is something that my peers see in me that they feel as if they don't

have that they can relate to that child. And the only thing that I can see is maybe it's my life experiences or the fact that I am a Black male. Also, like she said, there are things that you can say to certain Black boys and they get it! I have one (student) that I can say, "Do I need to call your mother?" "No, No!" But my White counterpart can say the same thing and he may look and say "Yes, you can call em, I want to talk to em!"

However, Kevin believed that it is important for Black educators to build a relationship with Black males because not all Black educators receive the same type of response from Black male students if they have not established a positive relationship. As an example, Kevin discussed one of his friends who is a Black educator. He said:

It is just those relationships mean so much! Cultivating those relationships mean so much and help you so much in the class. I have a friend in education but he is not able to build relationships with those Black boys and their families. And (he) gets the same response as my White counterparts because (he) hasn't taken the time to try to build a relationship.

Kevin talked about his willingness to see and visit his students outside of school to foster the relationships. Likewise, Timothy says he can say things that White teachers will not. But Timothy also stressed the importance of building relationships through attending students' events and games Timothy said,

There are some things that I can say to a kid that they will do and that won't fly as well if my White colleagues tell them. My Black male kids, I can tell them "Man, go sit your tail down somewhere!" No problem... Building those relationships is the key! Basically, it is vital! A lot of times, in reference to Black boys, they invite you to their games. The reason why I wear my shirt and tie is, I try to set an example for them on how to dress. And they see a Black man looking like that and he is dressing well. I think that helps them. I have had kids come to school with a shirt and tie just because of that... I think race matters.

Shanelle also discussed how she builds relationships with Black male students outside of school in organizations like the After School Club. In the Open Valley Elementary group, Barbara talked about how she has a Black male student who responds and performs well with her and other Black teachers on her team but does not respond nor perform the same for White teachers. Barbara shared:

There are two Black teachers and one Caucasian. He'll be fine in the two Black teachers' classes. But when you go over there, you feel that you don't have to listen and the rules don't apply to you. And you can just do as you please.

Barbara and Renee indicated that parental influence may impact how some Black male students respond to the race of their teachers. Renee suggested that many of the Black males view Black teachers as mother figures. Agreeing with Renee, Monique said that they Black males have a level of respect for Black teachers. Renee asserted while there are some Black kids who are not concerned about the race of a teacher, "I think that elementary students respect us. We could be mom, in a sense, versus a Hispanic or Caucasian teacher." Like the teachers in Appleton Elementary, Monique said that some teachers make no effort to build relationships or establish some connection with students. Loretta and Barbara discussed that Black teachers have a unique way of communicating their expectations to Black students with their tone of voice and their facial expressions. The focus group in Open Valley Elementary laughed as Monique and other teachers described and displayed the "Momma look." In discussing if all teachers can apply these techniques, Monique said that non Black teachers are hesitant to use them. Monique stated:

I have a teacher that will come to me and say, "But you can say that, you can do that." And I am like, you have a face, you have a mouth, you can say it...I feel that you can do the same things that I can do. And when you send them to me all the time, yes, they do have a different level of respect. It is different rather than you trying to handle it yourself. I feel like once you send him out, the child now listens to that person that you sent him to. Because the child feels like you can't control him. I am not saying that Black teachers don't send children out. But I know a lot of White teachers that are like, "I can't do that." I don't know if they even put forth the effort. Because they feel as if the students are not going to respond to them as they do to me.

Similar to Kevin's comments, the teachers at Open Valley Elementary shared when some White teachers at their school have problems managing the behavior of their Black male students, the teachers may send the Black males students out of their classroom to go into a Black teacher's classroom. The Open Valley Elementary teachers believed that when Black male students are

sent out of the classroom frequently, those teachers may lose credibility to manage or control Black males.

Nadia expressed that Black teachers may be able to speak to Black males without buffering or pretense. Using language that is common to the students, Black teachers may be able speak with boldness and assertiveness that the Black male student understands and respects. Nadia also believed Black teachers often were able to communicate effectively with Black male students and parents because of their willingness to form relationships. Nadia stated:

There are some things that we can say to our Black males that others cannot say to our Black males or get away with saying to our Black males. Or will be accepted by their parents being said to our Black males. So it is all in how you relate to them. So the more of us that they have to look up to, to “keep it real to them”, that is what they need.

Nadia suggested that some White teachers struggle with relating to Black males and more frequently have zero tolerance for Black male students. Nadia also talked about how some Black male students who perform well for her are considered behavioral issues in other teacher’s classrooms. Nadia has a willingness to go into the community to support her students.

Then you have other teachers that have zero tolerance for whatever. “Well, he is just a behavior issue.” Well, I don’t have issues with him in my classroom. Why is that? Are you trying to relate to him? You know people ask me, “What are you doing at the ball field?” “Well, one of my kids asked me to come see him. I don’t care if they are Black or White. If they ask me to come see them, I am at the field and I am cheering them on....So you got to let them know that you care about them. Because when they know that you care, then you got them.

In discussing Bakersfield Elementary, Kendra described the demographics of her school and her beliefs regarding the need for diversity. She also discussed her perceptions of how Black males in her school respond to teacher’s race. She shared:

We don’t have a lot of diversity at our school. Most of our students are African-American. And the majority of our teachers are African-American. I feel like they should have exposure to cultural diversity with other teachers. I think that a lot of times they may respect the Black teacher more than a non-Black teacher...It is definitely important to have that diversity and exposure.

Rafe also believed that it is important for schools to promote diversity. Rafe said that the relationships that teachers establish will determine how students will respond to a teacher, regardless of the teacher's race. He stated:

Just because the teacher is Black doesn't mean that they are going to treat them well and just because they are White does not mean that they are going to treat them bad....It really depends on the person, not so much their race. I do think it is important that they do get that exposure to another race. But as far as academics and respect, it just depends on that individual.

While Rafe felt that similarities based on race and socio-economic status were valuable, Rafe believed there was also an advantage when the students and teacher grew up in the same community. However, he insisted that all teachers should get to know their students and break down material to promote student comprehension. Rafe stated:

I think you have teachers that have grown up in very similar demographics and socioeconomic statuses to the students that they are teaching. So I think that they can relate on a personal level. But what does that have to do with academics and how a classroom is run, classroom management, the pedagogy of a teacher? I think that is where it kind of gets a little shaky. I think that all teachers no matter where they are and who they are dealing with should be able to know their learners to the point where they can break it down to their level regardless of demographic or socioeconomic status. As it pertains to here and how we relate to our students, there is an advantage but I don't think it is Black and White. I think there is a significant advantage of a teacher who grew up in the same environment and went on to get education and came back so they can guide the younger generation along the same path that they did. They let the students know that you can make it; you can make better decisions; your life can turn out well.

Negative stereotypes. When talking about curriculum and instructional strategies, Kevin discussed how schools are knowingly or unknowingly complicit in depicting Blacks, and Black males in troubling and negative images. Kevin communicated that Black male students become aware of this negative image and are often confused how they should move forward and make their way in the world. Kevin concluded:

I think it plays to the narrative of what it is to be an African-American in America: It is to struggle. I think it plays to that narrative or that social construct that we built in the media

about what it is to be African. They are struggling to define who they are because “Black boys aren’t smart.” If you let the social media tell it or you let the world tell it. We are not smart. We are supposed to have our pants down to our knees. We’re not supposed to use correct language. We are not supposed to come to school and behave. We are supposed to be thugs in the street. That’s the narrative! That’s what they see every day!

Kevin believed that many teachers view Black boys as not being academically competent.

Therefore, teachers frequently have low expectations for Black males in general and lower expectations for their academic achievement. Kevin remarked about what he sees as a relatively new teacher in his school. He asserted:

There are some very negative stereotypes like “African American boys are underachievers. We set the bar here so that we can make sure they meet it and they feel successful”. Meanwhile, we hold everybody else to a higher standard. Those are things that you see! Even in conversations with your peers, sometimes. You can pick up on that. I have to explain to them sometimes that boys are different. Yes, boys are different but there is not a deficit there! We just have to figure out a way to reach them....There is something *we* need to do to try to reach out to them more. *We* need to try to figure out how we can connect to them!

Renee suggested that some non-Black teachers may feel that Black males in elementary school have behavioral challenges that are very difficult to manage. Due to these perceptions, some teachers end up leaving Open Valley Elementary. She stated:

We lose a lot of other teachers because I feel like our African American males were perceived as the problem. There was fear. They could not handle them. The students ran over them. So a lot of those teachers left because they could not handle the kids.

Rose from Appleton Elementary also alluded to the fear that some teachers have regarding Black males. Rose commented:

It is important for Black males on how you relate to them. A lot of Black males are trying to find the positive role models. There are some teachers that are scared of teaching a Black child. They are afraid the child is going to cuss them out. It is that fear. They have the fear or don’t know what to do. Some of them will ask and some of them won’t.

At Open Valley Elementary, Monique felt teachers within the school may stereotype Black male students based on how the male performed academically and behaviorally the previous school year. Monique said:

Even from one grade level to the next. That child can change from one grade level to the next. But you have that previous teacher that is like, “They are going to do this, this, and this.” And sometimes it true. But then sometimes kids get in a totally different environment and they are fine. And so you have to listen to it in your head and be like “Let me not do this.” So I think from one grade level to the next.

Similarly, Nadia discussed how students and particularly Black males are often stereotyped by teachers as the new school year begins. Nadia discussed how she deals with teachers who try to share negative comments about students from the previous year. She stated:

I hate the cards that they give you at the beginning of the year with opinions from previous teachers. I put it to the side. I tell teachers to get out of my room. I don’t want to hear that junk. I tell the teachers “sometimes, oil and water don’t mix; you all just might not have gotten along. I don’t want to hear it!”

Nadia acknowledged that her boldness in confronting teachers who attempt to share negative information regarding Black males was probably the exception instead of the rule. She commented:

Normally, teachers listen. So they already have an opinion of that kid when they come. And the cycle continues. We even had one (teacher) at the beginning of school this year who wanted to interject her opinions about students that should not be together...I told her to stay in her lane, stay off my team, and let us handle our job!

Tamara discussed an experience she had with a school counselor regarding a Black male student who was in her kindergarten class. Although the student had demonstrated some negative behavior, Tamara communicated to the counselor that she believed that the student had great leadership potential. Tamara said:

And the counselor at that time told me, “Yeah, he could be the leader of a gang!” And I was like, “Are you kidding me! That is not what I meant!” I meant we need to hone in on him because he has great leadership abilities. When he left my class, they did not do right for him. They should have given him to the next person I know would have cared about

him. That teacher would have nurtured him. That teacher would have said your expectation is to do this! Now I think he is two or three years behind.

Tamara said teachers' perceptions of students' behavior may cause teachers to overlook latent skills such as leadership ability. In addition, she communicated that when Black male students have teachers that do not nurture or have high expectations for them, the consequences can be devastating for young Black males.

Shanelle believed that popular culture and today's music have a major role in perpetuating stereotypes regarding Black males. She commented that the music that young Black boys are exposed to is very negative. She said boys, five and six years old, are listening to music that teaches them to "disrespect women, to worship money, and to glorify violence." Shanelle shared her thoughts on how media projects stereotypical images of the Black male that are deceiving to some Black male youth. She said:

And the music that makes money is music that talks about violence, sex, and drugs...And these kids will know these songs, word for word. But cannot spell their sight words! I have a problem with that! Because how can you quote, word for word, this rap song that you heard just last month and I have been trying to get you to learn your sight words for three months? That goes back to exposure! They are exposed to the sight words at school. But all day long at home, they are exposed to these other things. I definitely think media plays a role in the reason why I have five or six year olds walking around here with his pants hanging down. Or having this aura that says "I am a thug or that's what I am aspiring to be." And it makes me so upset!

In sharing his thoughts regarding stereotypes, Rafe offered that stereotypes may stem from some truth. He said, "I think they come from some type of quantitative analysis.....where this is typically the behavior of a Black male. Not all Black males should or will adhere to that but that is the sad part about our society." He continued:

If I don't know anything about you, I am starting you out at that stereotype until you show me differently. When you see young Black males failing grades coming to school, poor appearance, poor parental involvement, that stereotype is going to kick in. Teachers are here to dwarf that kind of outcome. I use stereotypes as a scare tactic. Kids that break

rules in school break rules in the real world. The kids that break rule in the real world their reward is juvenile system or jail, drugs or death.

Rafe said that he tries to navigate students away from internalizing or adopting negative stereotypes. He stated:

If I see that the behavior is repeating then I will used those types of stereotypes to get them to weigh the options better and be more aware of their behavior and their mannerisms. It is sad. Stereotyping happens. As teachers we are trying to counteract that but we can't do it by ourselves....Everyone has to contribute. So I do think that stereotypes negatively impact the student. Because when someone or a teacher sees that, that is what you are going to align it up with. I guess as teachers it is our job to get them away from that stereotype. It is pegged upon all Black men no matter where you are. It is sad that is how society got us. But it is the truth across the board.

When asked if young Black males in the elementary internalize societal stereotypes about them,

Kendra said:

I think many of them have already internalized it particularly because they see their brothers, uncles, or dads already behaving that way. Even the football and basketball players that they look up to, although they may be making all of this money, they are still have those stereotypical ways....When you ask them to write about topics on assignment, most of them will include that they want to become a pro football or basketball player. They don't mention nothing about postsecondary school, welders, or architects or mathematicians...

Rafe also discussed the impact of internalizing societal stereotypes on Black males. He stated:

I think it is internalized. It is kind of hard for it not to be internalized when you see it in home environments and on TV and on the radio. It is almost like brainwashing. It is like subconscious thought....They have so many internal and external factors that attack their psyche. How do you begin to dive deeply enough to cause change? You can only do what you can from our standpoint.

Throughout the United States, recently, there has been increased media coverage and national scrutiny of the multiple incidents involving police shootings of Black males. Reflecting upon this, Nadia believed that Black males, even in elementary school, were becoming more concerned about these occurrences and aware of negative images and labels cast upon Black males in the country. Nadia indicated that she believed the racial conditions and racial divisions

in America are frequently topics of conversation within the Black male students' homes. Nadia stated:

Black males see on the news how Black males are being shot and killed over something stupid, like the music was too loud or you went to the store and had a pack of candy. The young Black boys are afraid. Black males at elementary level are afraid. They see the news. These boys are more intelligent than what we give them credit for. They are technology savvy. A lot of times when the boys come to school they have determined that they are not going to trust this person. And sad to say, those conversations are being had in their homes. Their parents are talking about it. Those conversations are occurring. You still have Whites that hate Blacks. You still have Blacks that hate Whites. And they are raising their children to have these same beliefs. So we are fighting a battle that is really hard to win.

Several of the teachers indicated that Black boys in rural communities are often negatively stereotyped because of the teachers' knowledge of the student's family. In other words, because a teacher may have a negative opinion of the Black male's parent, the teacher may associate or project that negative image on to the child. Renee articulated this point stating, "But I think we shut the kids down, especially Black males because we know the parents. We don't give them a chance sometimes. Because we are assuming that is how they are going to behave." Renee indicated that she had seen teachers stereotyping students because of their parents. In the Appleton Elementary school focus discussion, Nadia communicated a similar point. She stated in a rural community it is very likely that some of the teachers have taught or had encounters with the student's parents or siblings. She said, "So they know the families, especially in rural areas. A lot of people who are from this area you know the whole families." Nadia indicated that sometimes this knowledge may cause the child to be viewed negatively.

Renee shared her thoughts on the severe impact stereotypes can have some Black males. She commented, "Because it is a rural community and we have preconceived ideas. Then there are Black males who don't stand a chance because of who they are. So they don't educate the child anyway." When asked to elaborate she said:

“Your momma couldn’t do it. That’s why your momma can’t help you with your homework.” There are all these types of things that we have in us because we know, and it’s possibly true. Some of us don’t teach the child anyway. “So if you don’t do your homework at home then you are not going to get it. You are going to get a failing grade on this. And I am not going to put forth the extra effort to make sure you still succeed” despite not having homework at home or having the support at home. Not being able to stay after school, come in early. Not everybody is going to go the extra mile and teach them anyway.

The teachers in Open Valley Elementary, Appleton Elementary, and Bakersfield Elementary acknowledged that some Black teachers are also guilty of stereotyping Black male students.

Kendra, in the Bakersfield Elementary discussion, talked about how teachers have to be careful regarding stereotyping Black males based upon the teachers’ knowledge of the child or family in the rural community. Kendra suggested that there is a difference between knowing and getting to know your students. She stated:

I think that there is an advantage with knowing your students and being from the same community, the locations and families. The disadvantage would be that some teachers don’t draw the line between personal and education. With knowing the students, you may think that you can say certain things to a student but you have to be able to draw that line. Sometimes, when you know students, their families, and backgrounds, you have to be able to distinguish between the two. Sometimes when a family knows you, if you live in or are from the community, they may ask you to do other things outside of your guidelines. There is a difference between *knowing* your students and *getting to know* your students. When you get to know your students, it kind of takes away the bias. Everybody is on equal footing. When you already know some of the students, it kind of creates that grey area where some may get treated differently than others.

Cultivating value and worth. Teachers in the focus group discussions communicated that elementary schools play an important role in how Black male students come to see their place in the world. Unfortunately, Renee suggested that not every adult within the elementary school is willing to provide the support that is necessary to ensure that Black male students are academically and socially prepared and successful. She commented that all teachers are not the same. She stated:

But there is a disconnect! Not everybody has the child's best interest. Not all of us are encouraging. Not all of us. So they (students) figure out how to put the fence up and say, "I am not doing that!" And by the time you all get them, they are ruined.

Renee and Barbara discussed how some teachers may quickly judge a child as being incapable or unwilling to perform. According to Renee, Black male students perceive when teachers do not care for them. She added that Black males hear frequently of what they can't do. And consequently, the Black male students will build walls as a defense mechanism or may shut down with that particular teacher. Nadia in Appleton Elementary also suggested that "Kids know and can pick up on a vibe if a teacher does not like them." Similarly, Rose discussed Black male students perceiving that they were subjected to differential treatment. Rose said, "I have heard kids say, 'Well, this teacher picks on me every day.'"

Shanelle believed because teachers tend adhere strictly to traditional lessons, Black males do not learn enough about their future. Barbara communicated that teachers rarely take the time explain the significance of testing to students. Kevin suggested that elementary schools tend to prepare to student assume traditional roles. He commented:

I think in school we are training people in the same mindset as we did 50 years ago. We train students to become workers, to go work for a corporation, to go build someone else's dreams. We are not teaching them to be creative thinkers and think outside of that box. To be a producer and not always a consumer...Some of them we are training, setting them up, for failure. When we are walking down the hall, I don't have a problem with a child talking in the hallway. It just doesn't bother me. You know some of them don't walk, they twirl. It just doesn't bother me. But to always say you need to be all the way to the right, you need to do this. That reminds me of a jail mentality. You know, "Why aren't you in line? You should be facing forward!" That type of enforcement. It reminds me of a jail! That the mindset that I get when I hear that! I may tell them sometimes "you really shouldn't be running around and we walk on the right side because we don't want to run into someone." All the other stuff just doesn't bother me. That's where my mind goes when I hear that. Are we preparing them to creative or are we preparing them for jail? Those little things I think about sometimes, "are we preparing them for those types of things down the road?" And we don't even know when we are doing it we may be doing that.

Timothy suggested that it is important to instill Black males with skills that will enable to obtain success in the workplace. He stated, “I think he has to be prepared for the workforce before he can come into all these things. I don’t think preparing a kid for the workforce is something negative.” Kevin discussed the importance and urgency of providing Black males with quality education while they are in the elementary school setting. He asserted:

In my class, I set the bar high because I know failure is not an option. And I don’t think a lot of our peers necessarily understand that for a lot of these children their education could mean life or death! It is not something to take lightly. We teach children. And some of these children have the potential to be the next “Oprah” or “Barack Obama.” But we have to make sure that we are cultivating that into them and giving them that mindset.

Reflections on Race Summary

The themes that emerged from this section were 1) Communication, Care and Relationships, 2) Negative Stereotypes, 3) Cultivating Value and Worth. Teachers from each of the sites expressed their perceptions that a teacher’s race was important. The participants indicated that Black teachers are often familiar with Black culture and are able to communicate with many young Black males in a way the Black males understand. The teachers indicated that they frequently communicate with Black males in a manner that may be considered blunt and direct. Some teachers believed that non-Black teachers would not attempt to communicate with Black males students in the same manner. Teachers perceived their manner of communication with Black males may be considered unusual or unorthodox to some educators. However, the participants expressed that Black parents are usually very supportive of how Black teachers communicate with their sons. Several of the teachers asserted that they are able reach the Black males because they take the time to invest in establishing relationships with the students. They discussed their willingness to go to events or games outside of the school to support the students. They perceived that the difficulty that some teachers have with Black males was due

to the teachers not attempting to build a relationship with Black male students. The teachers suggested that many non-Black teachers have much less tolerance for Black males. Several of the teachers indicated non-Black teachers would send Black male students to their classrooms when they became frustrated with the students. Some of the participants suggested that Black male students perceive the Black female teachers as being mother figures. Many of these teachers suggested that they treat Black male students as if they were their sons. Most of the participants asserted that in spite of the teacher's race, the relationship that the teacher establishes with their Black male students is critical for student and teacher success. Negative stereotypes toward Black male students were prevalent in elementary schools according to the teachers. Some of the participants indicated that Black males were stereotyped as being unintelligent and behavior problems. As a result, teachers had low expectations for Black males. Even though they were in elementary schools, some of the participants suggested that some teachers feared that they could not manage or teach Black male students successfully. Stereotypes regarding Black males are often perpetuated based upon their prior year's performance. In addition, teachers suggested that Black male elementary students are stereotyped in a rural community based on the teachers' knowledge of the Black male's family. Some participants acknowledged that Black teachers, as well as non-Black teachers, are often complicit in adopting, utilizing and promoting stereotypes regarding Black male students. Participants believed that Black male elementary students sometimes internalized negative stereotypes. Some teachers thought that as teachers judged students based upon stereotypes, the teachers may overlook or dismissed talents and skills of the Black male students. Many of the teachers discussed the importance of valuing their Black male students. Some of the teachers perceived that all teachers did not have the best interest of Black males. Accordingly,

participants indicated that Black male elementary students could perceive when their teachers did not care them. Participants suggested that the Black males may act out or shut down based upon their perceptions of not being valued by the teacher. When teachers teach without providing Black males with the relevance of the instruction, some teachers suggested it is reflective of “going through the motions” but not truly valuing the importance of the instruction for students. Kevin asserted the importance of teaching Black males with urgency, stating that education could mean life or death for many of the Black male students.

Advocacy for Black Male Students

What interventions, strategies, and messages do Black teachers think are effective in improving academic achievement of Black males?

All of the teacher participants in this study expressed their commitment to helping to improve the academic outcomes and life chances for their Black male students. The following section explores the participant’s perceptions regarding the research sub-question: What interventions, strategies, and messages do Black teachers think are effective in improving academic achievement of Black males? This section highlights the advocacy of each teacher illuminating their personal beliefs, interventions, strategies or messages for improving the academic outcomes of Black male students in their elementary schools. This information was derived from the focus group discussions, researcher’s notes and participant’s profiles.

Shanelle

Shanelle discussed the importance of building relationships with Black males. She believed that many positive attributes come from taking the time to establish productive relationships with Black males outside of the school setting. She discussed how she accomplishes this through her work with the After School Club. She stated:

It is very important for us to interact with them on the level that we do because it helps them to build trust in us. So when they do enter into our classroom, they enter into my classroom, I already have a rapport with them. I already have rapport with their parents because I've had them in After School club for so long. So that part excites me! The building of the relationship because it is going to make easier by the time you get into my classroom because you will know what I will and won't accept.

In her classroom, Shanelle was also willing to use personal creativity and flexibility to ensure that she exposed her students to important Black history concepts while still teaching the required social-studies curriculum. Shanelle believed that Black males need more positive reinforcement in the elementary school to improve their educational outcomes. She wrote:

I am definitely sterner with them because I see their potential and I don't want them to squander it because of laziness or lack of motivation...I also use their language sometimes in an effort to get them to understand the content that I am teaching.

Kevin

Kevin shared that his experience of having very few Black teachers during his early education made him appreciate the value of having a "face like me." Kevin shared that he wants his Black male students to look beyond the traditional roles and labels that society will try to place upon them. Kevin indicated he wants to change their mindset so that they will come to envision themselves as "owners of production" and "producers". He wants to help students develop the mindset to move beyond just getting a job but to be a creator of good jobs for their county or community. Kevin believed that Black males need to know their true history. He stated:

From a historical point of view, I want them to know a complete history of themselves. Not just what we teach in school, but I want them to know about the kingdoms in Africa and what a great people they were! Because a lot of times when they only see what we teach in school, that leaves a lot to be desired! If you only see that, you are like "it's been like that forever so let's keep it going." You don't aspire to do better.

Kevin discussed that he sets the bar “high because I know failure is not an option. And I don’t think a lot of our peers necessarily understand that for lot of these children their education could mean life or death! It is not something to take lightly.”

Timothy

As a teacher, Timothy is able to see himself in the Black males that he teaches. Timothy is willing to use his knowledge of popular culture and music as a motivator to engage Black males and promote academic growth. He discussed how he motivates students:

... I can take that and that can be one way that I can get through to kids, just by knowing who they know. I use that! I used that to get through to them because if I stand in front of that class and say, “Listen, this is what TI said,” I got their attention. They want to know what TI had to say. So immediately, I got their attention! So I know I have to use whatever I can to get through to them. If they like rap music, I got to use rap music. Because I know I have a job, too....So I got to figure a way to motivate this student. After I do that, then I got to teach them. They teach me as well. That’s how I heard about the “whip and nay-nay.” So they know when they come in there that I know that stuff, I got their attention. “Mr. Timothy, play the Quan!” “Not yet, we got something to do, not yet!” I say, “Not yet” leaving them some possibility out there that “one day, he’s gon’ play it.” So you got to use what you got; you got to do what you got to do!

Timothy tries to set the example of how a “cool” but no-nonsense Black male professional should conduct himself. His tries to instill within his students understanding and respect for hard work and respect for others and yourself. Timothy believed that more Black male teachers are needed in the elementary school to help Black male students improve educational outcomes. In describing his approach with Black males, Timothy shared:

The most important thing is letting them know I care about them and I want them to succeed in life. Black students don’t care what you know until they know that you care. Talking sports with them will help build relationships with Black male students. Just knowing some of the people they know will help with Black boys....Knowing these people, you will quickly have their attention. I offer to take them horseback riding one weekend. That helps.

Nadia

Nadia discussed the importance of patience when working with Black males. She stated that many teachers demonstrate intolerance regarding Black male students. She says that there is a need for more positive role models and mentors for Black male students. She believed that it was important for Black males to have advocates in their lives to expose them to possible opportunities beyond their rural environment. She asserted the need for mentors to “take them on field trips that require them to dress nice” and “show them a different way of the thinking.” She believed in the value of establishing positive relationships with Black male students as well as their families outside of school. She indicated a willingness to go to games and do home visits when necessary to show care and concern. She suggested that “sometimes that missing piece is getting to know them on that particular level.” She indicated the importance of communicating clearly with Black males and having high expectations.

Rose

Rose indicated that she strives to incorporate concepts into her instruction in which Black male students can relate. Accordingly, she utilizes learning activities that may require students to play games. She may also have the students to conduct research regarding popular actors or famous athletes. Rose stated:

A lot of the kids are into sports. So if I can change lessons or have them play a game to learn. I will also use famous athletes that they can relate to like Vernon Davis, who is actually an interior designer. He owns an art gallery. That encouraged a lot of guys to look at art differently after learning that a famous Black athlete was into art. That got them motivated to paint and they did a good job.

In addition, Rose discussed her efforts to incorporate music and performance into her instruction to reach Black males. She stated:

So I bring in sports or music or whatever they like. The songs and dances that they do now, I incorporate them. Kids like to perform. I used this to get them to concentrate on the work. So I will allow them to have time to perform at the end of class if they complete their work. It motivates them and kids love it.

Rose also discussed the importance of establishing positive relationships, communicating and letting Black males know that you care. She stated:

You have to talk to them. It is all about their character and how you respect others. I tell them that they are valued, they are special. You have to channel their energy and motivate them. I encourage them to believe in themselves.

Rafe

Rafe asserted the importance of Black male students seeing images of discipline and consistency in school. Being a self-described disciplinarian, Rafe stated that he strives to be a consistent role model for the students with everything he does. He stated:

When you see me, my shirt is going to be in, my shoes will be tied, my face will be clean, to have pride in yourself. I constantly remind the students about the dress code. I know I am reaching them because when they see me they ensure that they check themselves. I am hoping that this expectation will impact them when they get to the high school. I want students to know that any teacher that they came in contact with at an early age tried to help them.

Rafe also discussed his desire to help students develop self-motivation and independence. He shared:

I pride myself in trying to guide students to be self-regulated learners. If no one else is studying, how about you do it because you want an A on your test and you want your parents to be proud. You want to be proud of yourself. You want Mr. Rafe to be proud. Whatever I can grasp to get them motivated and combat the world and society and what is pushed upon them, that is what I am going to use. I am always outside of the box to try to get the student to perform beyond the norm. Our motto is don't do what is popular do what is right. Just be consistent, if they see that every day at school, they may evoke a change at home.

In order to improve the academic and life chances of these students, Rafe communicated the need for educators to be fully committed to the cause. In describing his beliefs about instruction, he stated:

Consistency, persistence, dedication and determination are what drive my instruction. These kids need everything a teacher has to offer. It can be academic, sound and rational advice, behavioral interventions, real world applications, compassion, understanding,

care and genuine concern. Building a connection and bonding with these kids can be the key, regardless of the ethnicity of the teacher, to reaching and teaching them.

Kendra

Kendra believes that it is important for Black males to develop intrinsic motivation. To Kendra, this means “regardless of what is going on around you at the end of the day the only person that you have is yourself.” She tries to teach her Black males the importance of being self-reliant and not depending on others to make things happen. Kendra indicated that she speaks with her Black male students about the distractors that are out there and the odds that are against them. In spite of the odds, she urges her Black male students to:

“Look at what other people have overcome! They didn’t let those distractions stand in the way of the things that they truly wanted. I encourage them to find something that they are interested in themselves- not to just fit in the mode of their friends or what everybody else is doing. Try to find a passion that they truly love and enjoy.” We have real life conversations about your plan B. “You say football and basketball is your thing that you want to do. But what is your plan B? Do you want to be coach, manager, or recruiter or an owner of a team?” I also talk to them about “You may not have a mom or dad at home, but you have someone who cares about you, whether it is a teacher or your adoptive parents. You have somebody who you should want to make proud.” And those are the things we try to instill in them.

Kendra stated that she will use a variety of strategies to help reach her Black students. She said, “I encourage them to look beyond the norm. And it is acceptable to be an intelligent Black male.” She added:

Furthermore, I discuss life situations with them such as breaking the cycle if there are Black males in their families who are incarcerated. Also, I instill in the students that they will one day become the leaders of their households. And to effectively be leaders, they must have acquired certain educational skills and knowledge.

Monique

Monique shared that she has high expectations for her Black male students. She requires that her Black males meet her expectations for gifted. She demands that they demonstrate creativity and problem solving in the classroom. In discussing her thoughts of how to positively

impact Black male elementary students, Monique discussed the importance of relationships. She stated:

I think relationship building is a key strategy with teaching Black boys. Our black boys have enough against them; they need people that are with them. Once you have built the relationship, the boys begin to be comfortable with you and trust you. This then leads to the students not wanting to let you down. They feel as though they can talk to you about different situations that are arising. As teachers, we have to continue to lift these students up. We shouldn't be belittling them because of their surroundings. There are some things that they just can't help. School is their getaway from their environment and educators must use this to our advantage. We must take this time to educate those students to reach their full potential.

Barbara

Barbara believes strongly in the value of developing relationships with her Black male students. She takes the time to talk to the students and let them get to know her and her family. She is willing to attend community events with students to let them see her outside of the school setting. Barbara mentioned that she is very willing to stay after school and work with Black males if necessary. She talked about a particular incident with a male student where she worked after school with the student on mastering a concept:

I have one. He is ready to go home. And I am ready for him to go home. But I looked at him and said, "You know what, you can't go home and I can't go home, we are going to figure this out."

Barbara stated it is important to let Black boys know that they are smart. She shared:

They need encouragement and constant motivation. They also need teachers who will not take no for an answer. They have to have goals that they are working towards. Even a goal as small as playing basketball in middle school, we talk about these goals and discuss what has to happen to make these goals happen.

Renee

Renee believed that the main requirement for working with Black males is patience. She believed that it is very important for Black males to hear that their teacher believes in them.

Renee talked about telling Black males “You can do it.” She indicated her commitment to see them achieve success. She shared:

So they need to constantly hear “You can do this! You will do this!” I have a little boy who spent a lot of time home because of his behavior. I told him you are not going home until everybody else does. He can’t stand me! I am not going to send him home and I’m not going to send him to anyone else’s room. I told him, “You are going to stay in here. You can do this. You are going to do this.”

Renee wants to see her Black male students succeed. She said, “They hear a lot of what you can’t do from other places....But instead of saying you can’t do, let’s just maneuver it so that they can find success...” Renee felt strongly that it is essential to look and go beyond perceived behavior of Black males to nurture the students’ talents and skills. She emphasized that teachers must be committed to the students’ success.

Chelsea

Chelsea expressed that finding positive male role models can be highly effective in supporting young Black males to achieve academically and socially. As an educator working with Black male students, Chelsea tries to develop lessons that are engaging to the students. She strives to implement instructional activities that the young male students love or enjoy within her classroom. She also uses incentives for great behavior. She also believes in establishing meaningful and positive connections with the students’ parents. One way Chelsea believes this can be accomplished is through reaching out to the students’ parents, having supportive meetings and making positive phone calls “on not so good days.” Chelsea talked about the importance of parents and teachers collectively reaching out to students. She stated:

I hate to say this but it is a generational curse in some of our Black males. And it is up to teachers who care to help break that curse. But it is up to them to want to change to break

that curse. I think if you have teachers who care you will help both the parents and the students.

Jalesia

Jalesia expressed that it vital for a teacher to not to be judgmental with young Black male students but attempt to meet the child's academic and social needs. She suggested that socioeconomic and class differences between Black male students and teachers are significant factors in regards to the education of Black males. She stated:

I feel that socioeconomic backgrounds are impacting the education of Black males as well as teachers who cannot relate. It is almost impossible to help someone when you do not know what is causing their pain. Likewise, it is with educating Black males and education.

She stated, "I feel it is just about meeting them where they are. As a teacher, it is about building relationships and you will quickly know where a child is lacking or where they are in need." She further elaborated on this approach. She stated:

I begin by reaching them where they are. I know as a teacher where they should be coming in but some are not there yet. As their teacher, I recognize that and rather than label them as being low, I meet them where they are and bring them up. I also rely a lot on data. Data collected from testing or data that I observe informally during small groups. With males in general, I like to do more hand on things. This seems to capture their attention.

Jalesia shared an example of how she meets students "where they are." She said:

I have a student this year when he came to Pre-K they sent home like every week. Dad was in jail and mom even went to jail. His behavior was awful, disrespectful and defiant. But we did not give up on him. We told him after you finish with your tantrum come back over here and do this work. Because I am not going to let you not do it. You are going to have to do it. You are going to learn. He is academically doing fine and on grade level. I just feel like it is about meeting them where they are. You have got to show them that you love them. I know at the beginning of the year. I always heard if you don't show them that you care they are not going to learn from you. They have to know that you care. And that you care that they learn. And when you show them that, that you have expectations for them just like everybody else in the room, they will rise to the occasion.

Tamara

Tamara discussed that it is important that Black males understand the relevance of instruction and the necessity of them learning as much as they can. She strives to help her Black male students understand that their success is connected to the success of the community. She stated:

I want them to know that we expect them. “You are going to be taking care of us! You are my future! I need you. You might marry my little girl or my cousin’s little girl. I am thinking I want you to be a good husband and do good; get a good job.”

Tamara believed that letting Black males students know that you have high expectations for them is crucial. Tamara also discussed the importance of providing her Black male students with new opportunities. She said, “I try to encourage the males as much as I can. I also try to expose them to different things.” Providing Black males with positive reinforcement was also important. She stated, “They are going to be successful. It is our job that they are successful. Tell them over and over again, ‘you will do this!’”

Loretta

Loretta believed that it is important to have high expectations and hold Black male students accountable for attaining those expectations. She indicated that she uses a “tough love” approach while showing the students that they can do it. She stated she draws “from how we were taught. We try to instill that back in these males. I guess tough love. Knowing that they can do it, making them see that they can do it.” This particular approach is making sure that the students understand that they should take responsibility for their own actions. She tries to also let her male students see that she cares for them but requires them to do all that they can do to do their best. She also thinks that it is important to let parents of Black males know that she is pulling for their child. Because she has young sons of her own, she attempts to show parents that

she understands the challenges that they face and that she is willing to work with the parents and their sons. She said:

I try to tell my parents at the beginning of the year, “your child is in my room; I am going to treat your child like I do my own boys.” I stress that especially to the parents of my male students. I have three boys. I am going to push your boy just as I would want another teacher to push mine. I start the year off with that.

Advocacy for Black Male Students Summary

In describing how they attempt to promote the academic achievement of their Black males, many of the participants shared their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of establishing positive relationships with the Black male students and their parents. Some participants suggested that in order to maximize learning outcomes for their Black male students it is first necessary to demonstrate that you genuinely care about them. Some participants suggested that Black males students will not learn effectively from teachers who they perceive do not care for them. They discussed the importance of getting to know the Black male students not only in the classroom but outside of the classroom possibly through community or recreational events and activities. Some teachers believed that through the development of positive relationships, Black male students may begin to develop a greater trust and respect for the teachers, resulting in higher academic achievement under the teacher’s care. Very similar to establishing positive and caring relationships was the belief in demonstrating patience with Black male students. Some teachers communicated that teachers must not be judgmental regarding the Black student’s academic level, but must be willing to show patience and “meet the students where they are.” In taking this approach, the teacher may use a variety of positive strategies to help the student advance without insulting, belittling or degrading the student. Demonstrating care to Black male elementary students through their willingness to show patience was mentioned by several of the teacher participants. These teachers also believed that it was very important for Black males to

see that their teachers were willing to be consistent and persistent in asserting their expectations for academic achievement. In other words, the teachers needed to show the Black male students that they expected them to learn and would not allow them to disengage from learning. Several teachers also expressed that it was also important for teachers to consistently communicate their expectation for appropriate behavior to Black male students as well. Providing Black male students with consistent positive examples of appropriate discipline was viewed as important in helping the Black male students to gain the skills to navigate the challenges that they would encounter as they go through school. Some participants believed that this would be beneficial in the student's learning the concepts of self-regulation, self-reliance and independence. Some of the participants stressed the importance of making the instruction culturally relevant to Black male students. Teachers discussed their efforts to teach Black males important information regarding their history. They believed if the Black male students were more cognizant of the "greatness" from which they came, they may become more empowered realize the potential that they currently have within them. Several teachers discussed different ways that they attempt empower their Black male students. Some teachers discussed teaching Black males about overcoming obstacles, breaking barriers that are designed to constrain them academically and mentally, and changing their mentality to see themselves as leaders, producers, and business owners. Other teachers discussed how they teach Black males of the important role that they will have in the community, as the future leaders, husbands and providers. Many of the teachers indicated that they consistently provide their Black male students with positive encouragement, reinforcement, and motivation. They discussed frequently telling their Black males that they can accomplish their goals, that they are "smart" and that they are "proud of them." Maintaining high

expectations, requiring them to work hard, and holding Black male accountable were approaches that were common for many of the participants.

Parental Involvement

Although not directly a part of the semi-open questions, the teacher participants had strong opinions and perspectives regarding parental engagement and involvement. Without solicitation, each focus group brought parents and parent involvement into the discussion of Black male academic achievement in the rural school. From questions pertaining to the impact of rural environment to questions pertaining to discipline and race, the teachers interjected their thoughts and experiences regarding parents of Black males. Their perspectives varied from parents not being involved to obstacles that discourage parents from being active in the school as well as strategies that they use to promote parental involvement. For example, Kendra discussed the lack of parental involvement in her community when asked about the impact of a rural environment on Black males. Also, Tamara from Open Valley Elementary said, “A lot of times, our Black males only have one parent in the home, whether it be the female or the male, mother or father.” Rose also talked about Black males are highly influenced by whoever is rearing them. She stated.

That will affect them if they are growing up with their dads, if their grandmother is raising them, if their dad or mom is raising them. But it will depend on how they are raised, who is raising them and how much male role model that they have. And I think that’s what really affects them, depending on who they have to look up to in that community or school system.

In the first focus group, Shanelle shared her thoughts regarding parent involvement challenges when discussing the impact of the rural environment on Black males. As the group discussed the accessibility and frequency in which parents are often seen in a rural community, Shanelle

responded to Kevin's comments about how he frequently sees parents and suggested how that does not necessarily indicate increased parental involvement. She stated:

And I completely agree with what you are saying as far as running into the parents and the kids at the Rec department. But the problem that I think that we have, whether it be rural or city, is how to get the parents in the school building. Because, yes, they will go to the recreation department and they will fill the theater when their kids are on that stage. But they will not come into the classroom to see what their child is doing academically. I've had several instances where parents will come to the school, or call to the school wondering why their child's cell phone is taken up, but they won't come and inquire about their child's grades. I am glad that they feel comfortable enough to even call the school but when we need you to come in to talk about the academics and behavior part of it, we, as teachers, are still on the losing end on how to get them in the school building.

Obstacles to involvement. As Kevin responded to Shanelle's comments, he shared his thoughts on potential obstacles that may hinder parent involvement. He recalled his experience of being an outsider to the school. He stated:

I think it depends; because the way I look at it, is the school necessarily inviting to an African American male father into the school? And I can tell you from personal experience coming over here checking on nephews. There is not a sense of you are supposed to be here. It is the sense of "you are out of place." You know, in some of the looks you get. I will never forget, I was student teaching, first day. It wasn't, "hello, how are doing Mr. Kevin!" It was, "What are you doing here?" "Who are you?" It wasn't inviting! As a Black male, even fathers, they come in and it is not inviting, you are not going to want to go back to somewhere you don't feel welcome.

Continuing the discussion, Shanelle stated that she has seen more White fathers come to school and become active in the volunteer programs. Timothy responded that he thinks policies requiring background checks may hinder Black fathers from becoming involved in volunteer programs. He stated:

Part of that is because they probably can't participate because of prior issues. I don't think it is not so much that they don't want to. I think they are embarrassed because they know that they are not going to pass the background check.

Timothy went on to say that he thought that the negative reception that some teachers gave to Black male fathers was changing. He stated:

I think it is changing. I think it more so in the past like Kevin explained it. But I also believe, now, that environment is changing now. I think now it is more so as “please come on in, we need you! Thank you for being here.”

Kevin questioned Timothy on whether the teachers actually wanted Black fathers to become active in school. Kevin made the distinction between a Black educator and Black father perceived to be an outsider. Shanelle suggested that current safety expectations required teachers to be cautious and suspicion of persons entering the school. She stated:

As far as parents being in the building, I think that for me when we are talking about them being invited in or not invited in, it goes back to safety issues. Because when they know you, I feel like they welcome you more than when they don't know you. Because we have been trained if we see someone in the building that does not have that (School id) that says you are supposed to be here, we are taught to throw our hands up, throw our guard up, and question why you are here. Because of the issues that go on in society, it is almost like you are afraid to be too welcoming to just anybody. And that's male and female alike.

The Appleton Elementary's discussion prompted the question on whether rural school's emphasis on safety policies was hindering parental involvement and volunteering. Shanelle stated that background check practices may contribute to lower volunteering numbers. She said,

So little Johnny's dad probably does want to come and participate but little Johnny's dad has a record. I hadn't even thought about that; but that probably does play a part in why we don't see as many as we would like to.

When asked what would happen if policies or practices regarding background checks could be modified to lower the restrictions on individuals that may have had nonviolent and less severe criminal records in the past. Timothy responded:

If that can happen, I think we would see more Black dads. I do believe that. If we see more Black dads, I think you will see more Black kids, especially male kids: 1) not acting out as much. And 2) trying to do their work because they know, “Daddy's watching now.” So they are trying their best to do their work.

Kevin responded to this question, reemphasizing his belief of the importance of the school's efforts to make Black parents feel welcome. He stated:

I am still on that if you wave that magic wand and it is still not inviting, I am not going back. If I don't feel welcomed, I am just not going somewhere I don't feel welcomed! And I see what she is saying about being too friendly, but I think there is a happy medium somewhere that you have to find. Because I know for a fact that some of the behaviors that I was able to get under control last year were because I was able to reach out to fathers... When I got Dad on my side, we don't have any more problems.

Outreach to Parents of Black Males. Several the teachers indicated that they undertook specific efforts to reach out to and engage the parents of their Black male students. Kevin

discussed his efforts to make fathers feel welcomed to his classroom. He stated:

I tell my fathers at the beginning of the year, "I would love for you to come to at least two events that we have. If it's just to eat lunch, I want you to know that I know how important it is for you to be here, because I can't do this by myself!" For those that don't have that active father, I let the mother know, "if you have a brother, tell him to come eat lunch with them sometime." I want them to see a male in that classroom. I have a father that comes to read to them. Because it is important! Not just for my African American males, but also my Caucasian and Hispanics because they are already fighting stereotypes about us in the classroom. So if they can see something that is a direct contradiction to that, it is important for all of them to see that. I make a point of trying to get them to come in. You are more than welcome!

Loretta from Open Valley Elementary discussed how she begins the school year communicating to parents that she will treat their sons like she treats her sons. She stated:

I try to tell my parents at the beginning of the year, "Your child is in my room. I am going to treat your child like I do my own boys." I stress that especially to the parents of my male students. "I have three boys. I am going to push your boy just as I would want another teacher to push mine." I start the year off with that.

Monique said that there is a different level of trust between parents of Black males and Black teachers; the parents feel as if the teachers know what Black males face in schools as well society. Therefore, the parents and the teachers often have a mutual trust and understanding that they will work together to take care of the Black male. Tamara asserted that she takes the time to make sure that the parents of her students feel as if they are equal to her. To the contrary, she indicated that some teachers make parents feel beneath them or use tactics that may be intimidating to parents such as having a meeting with the parent and a large team of teachers

instead of one on one. Tamara shared an incident she personally experienced in a meeting with a teacher of her own child in which the teacher communicated as if Tamara was not supporting her own son with improving his reading skills at home. She stated:

I have sat in a meeting about my own child and she is telling me that I need to read to my child every night. Really?! Like that is not what I do! “Do you all have any books at home?” And they knew I was an educator. But that is how they perceive us. Like we don’t know anything! That we don’t know what to do at home with our own kids!

Tamara’s remembrance of this particular incident and the emotions that she felt with being viewed as an irresponsible parent were very significant. This was similar to Kevin’s remembrance of how he was made to feel being looked upon as an outsider in the school in which he would eventually be employed. Many of the teachers communicated that they go out of their way to try to engage parents and invite them in the school.

Parent Involvement Summary

At all three sites, the teachers began to discuss the parents of Black male elementary school students during the course of the conversations. As a result, Parent Involvement emerged as a major point of discussion with the following themes: 1) Limited Parental Involvement Perceptions, 2) Obstacles to Parent Involvement, & 3) Outreach to Parents. Some of the teachers perceived that Black males were negatively impacted because their parents were thought to be not involved in their school or their education. Teachers perceived that many of their Black male students came from single parent homes. Some of the teachers insinuated that the students were hindered as a result. Teachers frequently mentioned the lack of or the need for role models or father figures for the Black males. Whereas many of the teachers discussed parent involvement in regards to parents being physically present and visibly active at the school, some scholars have indicated that Black parents may view their involvement in different ways. Some have suggested

that educators tend to have a traditional view of parent involvement activities (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Howard and Reynolds (2008) wrote:

Part of the complexity of conceptualizing parent involvement through a social capital lens is the idea that the social capital utilized by middle class parents is frequently congruous with values and norms of White families and communities. Moreover, parents and families employing different forms of capital to advocate on behalf of their children are viewed through a deficit lens and in need of transformation or acculturation. (p. 86)

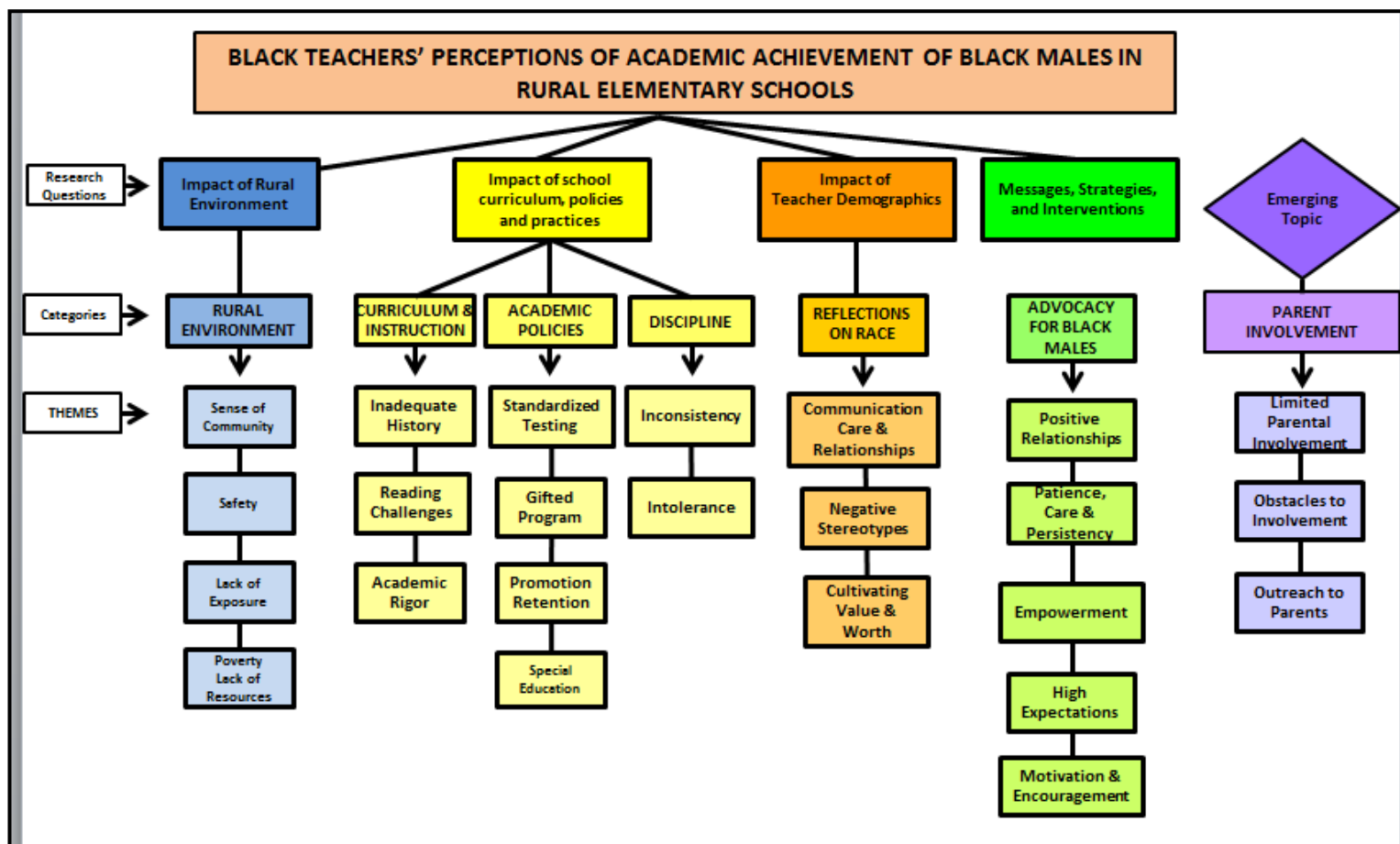
Teachers also discussed factors that may serve as obstacles to parent involvement. Kevin and Tamara believed that schools sometimes communicate in a manner that may erect barriers for parents of Black males. She shared how a teacher insinuated that she was not supporting her child academically. Kevin described his experience of feeling not welcomed as he entered a school. Teachers in Appleton Elementary discussed how safety concerns may limit involvement and volunteering. Policies such as background check requirements were discussed. Outreach to parents of Black males was also discussed at Appleton Elementary and Open Valley Elementary. The teachers discussed how they make efforts to engage, invite, and relate to parents of Black males. Lorretta discussed how she establishes rapport with parents by letting them know that she sees their sons as she sees her sons. Monique discussed the trust relationship that she perceives existing between Black parents and some Black teachers. The teachers communicated that they make an effort to view parents and have the parents feel as if they are equal and the same. Teachers suggested that their perception of parents and teachers being equal may not be felt by all teachers.

Summary of Chapter

This chapter explored the perceptions of fourteen Black teachers regarding the academic achievement of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia. The first section provided general descriptions of each participant in the study. The second section provided a brief overview of the organization of the data. The final section was the presentation of data. Many themes emerged as the researcher explored the research questions with the participants. Four major themes emerged from the participants' discussion on the impact of the rural environment on Black males: 1) Sense of Community, 2) Safety, 3) Lack of Exposure, and 4) Poverty/ Lack of Resources. The three themes that emerged from the discussion of Curriculum and Instruction were 1) Inadequate History, 2) Reading Challenges, and 3) Academic Rigor concerns. The major themes that emerged from the discussion of Academic Policies and Practices were 1) Standardized Testing, 2) Gifted Program, 3) Promotion & Retention, and 4) Special Education. From the discussion of Discipline Policies and Practices the following themes emerged: 1) Inconsistency, 2) Intolerance. The themes that emerged from the participants' Reflections on Race were 1) Communication, Care and Relationships, 2) Negative Stereotypes, 3) Cultivating Value and Worth. Themes that emerged from the reviewing participants' Advocacy for Black Males were 1) Positive Relationships, 2) Patience, Care & Persistency, 3) Empowerment, 4) High Expectations and 5) Motivation and Encouragement. Although not specific to a research question, Parent Involvement emerged as a major point of discussion with the following themes: 1) Limited Parental Involvement Perceptions, 2) Obstacles to Parent Involvement, and 3) Outreach to Parents. Figure one provides a conceptual illustration of the research questions, emerging categories, and the common themes derived this study.

Figure 1

Illustration of Research Questions, Categories, and Common Themes.



The next chapter will provide a summary of the study, review the finding through the lens of Critical Race Theory, and offer recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of Study

Numerous research studies, reports and articles have shown that the academic achievement of Black male students is below most other subgroups (Darensbourg, Perez & Blake, 2010; Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz & Casserly, 2010; Prager, 2011). While dominant explanations for negative educational outcomes for Black males tend to point to the Black students' motivation, their family, and their culture (Emdin, 2012; Gira, 2007; Kim & Hargrove, 2013), Critical Race Theory endeavors to challenge deficit explanations for disparate educational outcomes. Some scholars have suggested Black educators may feel left out discussions regarding teaching and learning for Black students (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1991; White, 2012). However, because of cultural connections and their experiences with marginalization, Black teachers may be able offer valuable information and counter stories regarding Black male achievement (Foster, 1991; Milner, 2006). Accordingly, Critical Race Theory was the framework that guided this study. Critical Race Theory asserts racism is entrenched into the fabric of our nation. For critical race theorists, racism pervades every institution, including schools. While incidents involving negative racial stereotyping, inequity, and discrimination are all too common today in our society, manifestations of racism can also be discerned within the halls of schools throughout the country. Rural elementary schools are not immune from influences and impact of racism. Although dominant narratives tend tell a story of deficit regarding Black male youth, Critical Race Theory strives to expose contradictions and illuminate truths that may have hidden regarding their plight (Zamudio et al, 2011). The goal of this study was to listen to Black teachers share their experiences, perceptions and stories regarding the academic achievement

Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia. This research endeavored to identify the factors that Black teachers perceived were significantly impacting the educational achievement of Black males. In this study, the researcher sought to address the following questions: 1) What impact do Black teachers perceive attending elementary school in a rural environment has on the academic achievement of Black males? 2) What impact do Black teachers perceive school curriculum, policies and practices have on the academic achievement of Black males? 3) What impact do Black teachers perceive teacher demographics have on the academic achievement of Black males? 4) What interventions, strategies, and messages do Black teachers think are effective in improving academic achievement of Black males?

Methodology

Qualitative research is an inquiry approach in which the researcher 1) explores a central phenomenon, 2) asks participants questions and collects the views of participants, 3) analyzes and codes the data for description and themes, 4) interprets the meaning, 5) writes a final report (Creswell & Clark, n.d). Scholars conducting qualitative research may use a narrative approach to study and interpret stories of life experiences (Gall et al., 2010). Thus, stories can be examined and analyzed to demonstrate how voices are silenced or contradictory to dominant perspectives (Creswell, 2007). Bell (2002) indicated that this requires going beyond simply telling stories, but it requires “an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates” p. 208. Creswell stated that narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories of life experiences of a small number of people. A narrative approach allows researchers to present complex and rich experiences of participants.

Purposeful sampling was used to select teachers for the study from three rural schools in middle Georgia. Fourteen Black teachers participated in the study. The participants met the

following criteria: 1) High academic achievement of Black males in the teacher's class on standardized summative assessments; and, 2) The teacher's ability to demonstrate care and develop positive relations with his or her Black male students.

Data Collection

The primary method for data collection occurred through focus group interviews conducted at the three school sites. Focus groups were used as a means of generating conversation and discussion regarding specific topics. Focus group interviews allow researchers to develop deeper insights into how participants think. Through group interaction and non-verbal communication, researchers are able to gain more understanding of the phenomena being studied (Nagle & Williams, 2014). The researcher scheduled the focus group sessions at convenient time and locations for the participants. An informed consent document (See Appendix C) was provided to all potential participants at the time of the Focus Group discussion. The participants were asked questions that allowed them to share their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding the achievement of Black male students. As the interview occurred, the researcher took notes to capture significant moments and points of emphasis during the interview. Additional questions were asked when appropriate to clarify understanding as needed. All of the focus group interviews were digitally recorded with an iPad. The researcher created an abridged transcript of the audio recording.

Data Analysis

The researcher used constant comparison as the analytical technique to analyze the data collected from the focus groups. Constant comparison was first used in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) but was also used with focus group data (Doody, et al., 2013). Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) discussed that there are three major stages which characterize constant

comparison analysis. Open coding was used in the first stage. During this stage, the researcher read the transcripts and identified and highlighted significant phrases, words, or concepts from each participant as he or she responded to the questions or participated in the discussions. Axial coding was the second stage. During this stage, the initial phrases and concepts were grouped into categories of (1) Rural Environment, (2) Curriculum and Instruction, (3) Academic Policies and Practices, (4) Discipline Policies and Practices, (5) Reflections on Race, and (6) Advocacy for Black males. Parent Involvement also emerged as major point of discussion. Therefore, it was added as an additional category. The final stage was selective coding. During this stage, the researcher sought to develop themes that expressed the content of each group. Subsequently, the researcher compared the statements, experiences, and perceptions of all the participants to identify and highlight any common themes that emerged from all of the participants. The common themes that emerged from Rural Environment were: 1) Sense of Community, 2) Safety, 3) Lack of Exposure, and 4) Poverty/Lack of Resources. The common themes that emerged from Curriculum and Instruction were: 1) Inadequate History, 2) Reading Challenges, and 3) Academic Rigor Concerns. The common themes that emerged from Academic Policies and Practices were: 1) Standardized Testing, 2) Gifted Program, 3) Promotion & Retention, and Special Education. The common themes that emerged from Discipline Policies and Practices were: 1) Inconsistency and 2) Intolerance. The common themes that emerged from Reflections on Race were: 1) Communication, Care and Relationships, 2) Negative Stereotypes, and Cultivating Value and Worth. The common themes that emerged from Advocacy for Black males were: 1) Positive Relationships, 2) Patience, Care, & Persistency, 3) Empowerment, 4) High Expectations, and 5) Motivation and Encouragement. The common themes that emerged from Parent Involvement were: 1) Limited Parental Involvement, 2) Obstacles to Parental

Involvement, and 3) Outreach to Parents. Doody and colleagues (2013) indicated that constant comparison is beneficial when there are several focus groups within the same study, which was the case for this particular study.

Research Question One

What impact do Black teachers perceive attending elementary school in a rural environment have on the academic achievement of Black males?

During the focus discussions, teachers shared their perceptions of how Black males are positively impacted by going to elementary school in a rural environment. Teachers discussed that they perceived a greater closeness to students and their parents in the rural environment. They believed that there was a sense of community present in their rural environments that facilitated positive relationships with students and parents. However in discussing negative aspects of the rural environment, teachers discussed the lack of exposure and poverty. From a critical race theory perspective, their concerns regarding lack of exposure, lack of resources and poverty within the rural community are significant indicators inequity and inequality. Throughout the nation, the dominant narrative of opportunity communicates a vision of a fair society where individuals are exclusively and solely responsible for the levels of success that they obtain in life. According to this premise, every individual has an equal chance to succeed or fail. Ultimately, how the individual advances will depend on neutral concepts such as their skills, their motivation, and their intelligence. Education is viewed as providing the unbiased platform for anyone, regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status, to obtain the skills that will enable the person to succeed and have a better life. When the teacher participants spoke about the lack of exposure, they addressed their perception that Black males in the rural environments may not receive exposure to some of critical elements needed for their academic and social

success. They discussed that many Black male students may not have many chances to get out of their county to see, understand or take advantage of opportunities beyond their rural surroundings. They discussed that Black males who were highly talented in music and performing arts rarely had the opportunities develop and enhance their skills within the rural school or rural county. In addition, participants discussed the inability of the rural school and rural school system to consistently provide adequate instructional supplies, curriculum and programs that may be beneficial to Black males due to financial or budgetary constraints. They perceived that poverty severely impacted Black males on multiple fronts. In regards to schools, some participants believed that the tax base in their rural environment was lower because of the lack of industry and thriving businesses. The three rural counties in which the schools are situated have very limited industry, businesses and places for employment. Positioned in the historical cotton belt region of Georgia, these communities have traditionally relied on agriculture. Many of the families of the students who attend these schools have resided in the respective counties for decades. The loss of viable employment options within these communities has had a severe impact on many rural families. According to some participants, the impact of generational poverty can be observed in the conversations and interactions with students and their parents. Some of the participants suggested that students were limited in their aspirations of what they could accomplish and become. To these participants, the students could not see beyond the rural environment. In some ways, the participants spoke of Black males being physically and mentally trapped in the rural environment.

Poverty in rural environment contributes to a lower tax base available within the county. When less educational funding is available for the school system to invest toward their students, the quality of the education that students receive within that system may be adversely affected. If

the rural school system has inadequacies in resources available to educate its students, can we say that the students have equal access to quality education? If the rural environment contributes to the lack of exposure to critical elements needed for success, can we say that the rural student will receive the essential skills that are necessary for continued success? If generational poverty pervades the rural community, impacting students and their families, can we truthfully assert that the rural student is assured the same opportunity for educational and life success that is often professed in the dominant narrative? Critical race theory will assert that financial and resource inequities present in rural environments may result in students' receiving lower quality education. Multiple research reports have discussed how inequitable educational opportunities lead to diminished outcomes. Gloria Ladson-Billing (1998) stated:

Perhaps no area of schooling underscores inequity and racism better than school funding. CRT argues that inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism. The inability of African Americans to qualify for educational advancement, jobs, and mortgages creates a cycle of low educational achievement, underemployment and unemployment, and standard housing. Without suffering a single act of personal racism, most African Americans suffer the consequence of systemic and structural racism. (p. 24)

The amount of educational funding that is available in the rural community has a significant impact on students in multiple ways. Lower funding may impact the curriculum resources that teachers receive. School infrastructure and accommodations may be affected. In addition, the school system's ability to retain quality teachers may be challenged if the school system is unable to compensate teachers as competitively (Shuman, 2010). These structural factors may complicate the challenges regarding improving educational outcomes for Black male students.

Research Question Two

What impact do school curriculum, policies and practices have on the academic achievement of Black males?

Curriculum is often referred to as being neutral. Within most schools, curriculum standards are presented as the fundamental content knowledge needed for academic proficiency. However, from examining the teacher participants' perceptions through the lens of Critical Race Theory, some policies and practices may adversely impact the academic achievement of Black males. Some of the participants acknowledged that many Black males struggle or have difficulty with reading in the elementary school. These teachers shared that they have observed the Black males struggle with text and become frustrated. Although multiple research reports confirm the struggles and challenges that Black males experience with reading (Howard, 2003), Critical Race theory highlights other factors that may be contribute to those reading challenges. Teacher participants in this study believed that curriculum standards did not provide adequate and appropriate coverage of Students of Color. Therefore, Black males rarely have the opportunity to see positive images of themselves in the lessons or literature required in elementary schools. Accordingly, Hughes-Hassell, Barkley, Koehler (2009) found that Children of Color are underrepresented in transitional literature found in elementary schools. They wrote:

At a time when children are expected to be making progress toward becoming self-regulating, independent readers, it appears that children of color are denied the very resources that might not only motivate them to read but also allow them to make text-to-self connections— a critical part of becoming proficient readers. (p.13)

Consequently, Black male students may often be deprived of opportunities to see themselves, their families, and their experiences reflected in texts. In addition, participants discussed that

much of the history and images regarding Black people that is covered in the curriculum is cast negatively. For these participants, the void of authentic positive images of Black Americans and Black males within the curriculum causes some Black male elementary students to have limited aspirations of what they can become. Some Critical Race scholars contend that the goal of curriculum is to prioritize and advance dominant society's beliefs regarding what knowledge is important or what knowledge should be valued. According to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998), critical race theory views the official school curriculum as a means to maintain White supremacy. Consequently, the instructional content and concepts that are aligned to dominant society's worldview are accepted and promoted. Conversely, the instructional content and concepts that do not align to dominant society's worldview are rejected and dismissed. Ultimately, dominant society determines what knowledge is deemed important and valuable and what knowledge is deemed insignificant and worthless.

In addition, teachers discussed their perceptions that standardized testing practices in their elementary school were problematic and negatively impacted Black males. Citing their perceptions of excessive testing and unfair tracking practices, the teachers communicated their beliefs that standardized testing often resulted in certain groups of students being placed on more advantageous academic pathways. Whereas, those students who were unsuccessful with standardized testing were often placed on academic pathways that were less advantageous, potentially resulting in the students not receiving the academic instruction and support that may be essential for their future success. Critical race theory has suggested that the use of standardized testing has been a way to maintain the property interest of Whiteness. CRT scholars assert that standardized testing ultimately results in various students being tracked into specific curriculum pathways that significantly impact whether the student receives the training, skills

and support to pursue college or postsecondary education. Zamudio et al (2011) stated that standardized tests tend to favor mainstream knowledge over the knowledge that Students of Color possess. They stated:

The emphasis on standardized tests above all other types of learning damages the intellectual potential of all students. By privileging and accepting only one way of knowing, it devalues the funds of knowledge that students of color bring with them to their educational experience. (P. 40)

It is significant to note that the teachers in the study raised concerns regarding the gifted program and special education program at their school. Teachers discussed that Black male students were rarely recommended for the gifted program by elementary teachers. Although there were some students of color in the gifted program, the participants perceived that the gifted program was “exclusive” and overwhelmingly benefited White students. One participant questioned the purpose stating, “...What is the point? To say my child is better than yours.” Some teachers asserted that students in the gifted program are provided access to advanced academic tracks or pathways that will be highly beneficial to the students’ future academic success. The teachers perceived that students in the gifted program would reap the benefits of more rigorous instruction that emphasizes concepts such as collaboration, problem-solving, and creativity. In addition, the students would have more exposure to academic fieldtrips, enrichment activities and cultural experiences. Conversely, students who were not classified as gifted but who may be just as talented may not receive comparable instructional and academic support that will enable them to attain the same level of academic success.

The teachers’ perceptions that the criteria to get in the gifted program could be modified or exempted or overlooked for certain students, in spite of the students not meeting stated

qualification, were troubling. Teachers were very cognizant of the demographics of the gifted program and the special education program. Knowledgeable of the substantial academic benefits associated with the gifted program and significant disadvantages associated with the special education program, the teachers believed that school allowed these programs to function in manner in which educational opportunities for Black males to advance beyond the status quo were severe limited.

Critical race theory asserts that schools often operate with supposedly neutral policies and practices that inevitably perpetuate or reproduce inequalities (Zamudio, 2011). In opposition to claims of meritocracy, some critical race scholars have asserted that programs such as the gifted program and special education, often function to privilege certain groups of students while simultaneously disadvantaging other groups. Ladson-Billings (1998) discussed that students of color are often viewed from a perspective of deficiency. As a result, instructional techniques utilized by classroom teachers directed toward Black students tend to focus on or involve forms of remediation. Therefore, in K-12 schools, many strategies, interventions, and programs are implemented with the suggested goal of remediating or compensating for the students' deficiencies. However, students receiving such services may not ever move beyond or overcome the labels associated with deficiency. Blaisdell (2005) stated:

Analyzing classrooms in this fashion can help illuminate how educators place blame on students, especially those in lower-level classes. These students are blamed for the types of classes they attend and for the conditions of those classes. Students are given “primitive” conditions and resources—creating “primitive” spaces—and then blamed for not appropriately or adequately using and enjoying those spaces. Analyzing how those classes are racialized can shift blame from the students and put it on the practices that

place students in lower level classes and contribute to the inferior conditions of those classes. (p.44)

The teacher participants also indicated that Black boys in elementary schools were often negatively impacted by discipline practices. Participants shared that some teachers are often less tolerant with Black male students. Participants stated that non-Black teachers may send Black boys to their classrooms, when they became frustrated with the student. The participants felt that Black male students often are reprimanded or disciplined for minor offenses that the participants view as insignificant. Lyons and Chelsey (2004) suggested that Black males are more likely to be disciplined more harshly in integrated settings. In addition, Black males are more likely to be disciplined harshly for subjective infractions such as disrespecting authority and talking back (Lyons & Chelsey, 2004). Teacher participants perceived that inconsistency in discipline consequences resulted in Black male students receiving mixed messages. Downey & Pribesh (2004) stated White teachers may misread Black males behavior style as defiance. While Black students may be confused as to why the teacher is angered. They suggested that the activity of Black children may not align with what teachers view as being appropriately. Downey & Pribesh quoted Boykin (1978) “black children are bored because school is a relatively unstimulating, constraining and monotonous place, and perhaps relatively more compatible with the more placid existence of suburbia.”

Tracking and discipline practices are used as a means of creating separate educational spaces within the schools. Black males are often denied appropriate access to educational opportunities by frequently being overlooked in regards to gifted and enrichment opportunities. In addition, Black males often are disciplined disproportionately and are more likely to be removed from the classroom due to teacher intolerance. Such disparate discipline consequences

may result in Black males not receiving the educational support to promote their academic growth.

Research Question Three

What impact do Black teachers perceive teacher demographics have on the academic achievement of Black males?

All of the participants indicated that Race of the teacher can be significant and important regarding the academic outcomes of Black males. The participants indicated that Black teachers are often familiar with Black culture and are able to communicate with many young Black males in a way the Black males understand. Some of the participants suggested that Black male students perceive the Black female teachers as being mother figures. Historically for Black students, Black teachers have served as disciplinarians, mother figures, counselors and advocates (Lyons & Chelsey, 2004). Several the teachers asserted that they are able reach the Black males because they take the time to invest in establishing relationships with the students. Many scholars have discussed cultural connections and care often exhibited by Black teachers to Black students (Foster, 1991; Lyons & Chelsey, 2004; Milner, 2012). Participants perceived that the difficulty that some teachers have with Black males was due to the teachers not attempting to build a relationship with Black male students. Howard (2003) suggested that racial and cultural differences between students and teachers may lead to school failure of students of color. In discussing his interactions with other teachers about problems that they were having with Black males, one participant indicated that many of his colleagues view Black male elementary school students from a deficit perspective. From this vantage, teachers feel that students lack skills to be successful. However, he indicated that he attempts to explain to his colleagues although Black boys are different, they are not deficit.

Negative stereotypes toward Black male students were prevalent in elementary schools according to the teachers in this study. Participants indicated that they had observed non-Black and Black teachers harbor negative stereotypes for Black male elementary students. Stereotypes may communicate that Black students don't have skills and normative culture (Yosso, 2005). Sometimes educators promote the concept of "Culture of Poverty" to explain low outcomes for Black males (Lynn, 2006). Some of the Black teachers in this study attribute some of their Black male students' struggles to poverty. When teachers view Black students through stereotypes the teachers will have low expectations for Black students and treat the Black students differently, sometimes poorly. Literature suggests that some teachers adopt the negative societal stereotypes that are prevalent regarding Black males. Shuman (2010) wrote, "This irrational fear at times leads younger, more inexperienced instructors to conclude that young African American males are simpler, smaller versions of the adult African American males seen committing crimes almost daily on television and in films" (p.11). As a result, the teachers do not believe that they can teach the Black male students (Shuman, 2010). Several teachers in the focus group discussed that some teachers fear their Black male elementary school students and do not believe that they can teach Black males. Some of the participants indicated that Black males could perceive when teachers disliked them. Black students are highly affected by the expectations that their teachers have for them. The teacher participants attested to the power of expectation when they shared their personal stories of how they were impacted by teachers' expectations when they themselves were young students. When teachers based their instruction and expectations for Black male elementary students upon stereotypes of Black males, the students may suffer academically, socially, and emotionally. Claude Steele stated, "Through long exposure to negative stereotypes

about their group, members of prejudiced-against groups often internalize the stereotypes, and the resulting sense of inadequacy becomes a part of their personality” (p. 169).

Research Question Four

What interventions, strategies, and messages do Black teachers think are effective in improving academic achievement of Black males?

A critical purpose of this study was to listen to what the participants believed was necessary to improve the life chances of Black males in elementary school. As teachers, what were their strategies and messages that they used to impact positive change and empower young Black males? A major objective of critical race theory is to advocate for positive change for people of color. Proponents of critical race theory in education desire not only to illuminate racial inequality, inequity and social injustice but also to actively strive to overcome or eradicate those practices that perpetuate unfair outcomes. Themes that emerged from the participants were 1) Positive Relationships, 2) Patience, Care & Persistency, 3) Empowerment, 4) High Expectations and 5) Motivation and Encouragement. All of the participants shared their practices and experience regarding establishing positive relationships with Black male students as well as their families. Participants were willing to engage students in conversations, learn about their interests, support them in and out of school and develop relationships based upon trust and respect. The level of care and patience demonstrated for their students was comparable to the care expected of a biological parent (Irvine, 1991; Milner, 2012). In addition, all of the participants indicated that they held high expectations for their Black males, academically and behaviorally. Some of the participants discussed their efforts to provide students with lessons that had real life applications. Teachers from all of the schools indicated that they frequently discussed the importance of character and responsibility to their Black male elementary students.

Scholars have discussed the importance of helping Black males to develop critical consciousness through real life applications, dialogue and problem solving (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Irvine (1991) discussed that Black teachers more frequently incorporate the culture of students and historical experiences in teaching. Chelsey (2004) discussed that Black teachers tend to develop more personal relationships with the students and are willing to advocate them. Some participants insisted on teaching the Black students about their history and future possibilities for their life. Some researchers have suggested that successful teachers of Black students are willing to use African culture in teaching students, even if the instructional strategies are not fully endorsed by the school systems in which they are employed. Culturally relevant pedagogy provides students with critical knowledge of themselves so that they are empowered to advocate and improve society (King, 1994). Carter (2008) stated when teachers are willing to be explicit with students of color about the structural barriers that can potentially impede their social and economic mobility they practice an ethic of care. She stressed the importance of Black students having the support of caring adults. According to CRT, schools tend to provide students with the basic knowledge and skills that will allow them to occupy their respective places in the labor force based on gender, class and race (Jay, 2003). However, teacher participants such as Kevin attempt to teach Black male students in a manner that will challenge this narrative of status quo. He indicated that he wanted his students to be the “Business owners” and “producers” and not always consumers. Some CRT advocates believe that teachers can use their classroom to help Black students develop the consciousness to learn to overcome oppressive structures.

Critical Race Analysis of Parental Involvement

A major topic that arose during all of the focus discussions was parental involvement. Several of the focus group participants raised concerns regarding the level of involvement that

Black parents had in the education of their sons. Rema Reynolds (2010) discussed research that examined the involvement of Black parents in the children's education. She stated, "Educators often lament Black parents' lack of school site presence and school activity participation. They questioned whether Black parents promote learning at home, and many may also question the extent to which Black families care about their children's school achievement" (Reynold, 2006, p.149). Solorzano (1997) discussed prevalence of cultural deficit models in schools. According to the deficit models, parents are to be blamed for the low educational attainment of their children because the parents do not embrace the educational values of dominant society. Some of the participants in the study appeared to question the quality and quantity of parent involvement in the education of Black males. However, during the Appleton discussion, Kevin offered a counter story that questioned the degree in which parental involvement is encouraged or wanted within the school. Kevin believed that schools often erect barriers or obstacles that discourage or limit Black parents from becoming actively involved. Kevin shared his personal experience of feeling like an outsider as he attempted to become involved in the school. Kevin's insistence that schools are not inviting to parents, especially Black male parents, illuminates a troubling proposition. Many teachers evaluate or define parental involvement based on dominant notions. In this respect, teachers expect parents to volunteer during instructional time, help students with their homework, and initiate contact with them regarding academic concerns. Although the dominant narrative portrays Black parents as not being engaged or not providing the necessary parental support to help their child academically, Kevin's personal experience of feeling shunned suggests that schools and educators may be culpable in the creation of an environment that discourages Black parents from becoming involved. Kevin discussed with the focus group the vibe that he felt entering the school. He indicated that the school was not inviting and he felt that

he was not wanted in the school. Kevin discussed that he was questioned by staff members and was given “looks” that communicated that he was an outsider. His description of how the teachers looked at him could be considered as micro-aggressions, acts of disregards representative of attitudes of white supremacy and Black inferiority. Kevin’s perception of feeling as an outsider is also similar to Dubois’ concept of double consciousness (Reynold, 2006). Even though he would eventually become an insider as a teacher, he saw himself as outsider in this instance and he felt the impact of being an outsider of the school. Although members of the focus group suggested that safety concerns may have been the impetus for the reception that Kevin received, Kevin believed that it was because he was a Black male. The remembrance of how he felt was so impactful that Kevin resolved to go above and beyond when he became a teacher to make sure his students’ parents, especially their fathers, feel welcomed, appreciated, and wanted in his class. Reflecting on his perception of an uninviting school environment, he asserted, “I am still on that if you wave that magic wand and it is still not inviting, I am not going back. If I don’t feel welcomed, I am just not going somewhere I don’t feel welcomed!” Many researchers and educators agree that parental involvement is very important to academic achievement. However if schools are uninviting to Black parents, Black parents may become hesitate to engage in the school setting. Ultimately, this may adversely impact the success of the Black male students. Parents may not feel comfortable being in the school and sadly, Black male students may lose a very important advocate.

Implications

Black males in rural schools may lack exposure to critical resources needed for their success. Rural schools often face a variety of challenges in regards to providing education to their students. Factors such as student population shifts, teacher turnover, and lower tax base

may inhibit the school system's ability to provide needed resources to teachers and students. Schools in rural community may not be able to provide a variety of course offerings. As a result, students who need diverse curricular and nontraditional academic options to meet their instructional needs may be limited in rural communities. Rural schools are often in communities that are great distances from metropolitan or urbanized areas. The distance between the child's rural school and urban areas in which the student could potentially have more options is often very challenging. The absence or lack of viable employment options in rural areas may impact students in multiple ways. Limited employment options within the rural community may require the child's parents to travel many miles for employment. As a result, the parents may not be able to engage in traditional forms of parent involvement within the school. The students may not see examples of viable professions within their community. Schools may not have access to business partners, mentors, and role models to engage in or connect with the school. Rural school systems may have difficulty recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers. These schools may not be able to compensate teachers as competitively (Reeves, 2003).

Academic and behavioral policies and practices in rural schools may limit Black males access to rigorous and advanced instruction. Because some elementary school teachers do not believe that Black male students are fully capable of high academic achievement, the participants in this study asserted that some elementary school teachers often have low expectations for Black males. Teachers shared that Black males are frequently targeted for discipline. They also shared that Black male students may be guided toward less rigorous and less advantageous courses. Ladson-Billings (2011) discussed how Black males as young as eight years old may "criminalized" in school. She wrote, "Their childhood evaporates before they are eight or nine-years-old when teachers and other school official begin to think of them as 'men'" (p.10). She

stated that schools often create infractions that apply primarily to Black boys. As result Black boys may be removed from class and excluded from academic opportunities.

Deficit thinking and stereotypes may confine the academic achievement and aspirations of Black male elementary school students. Many participants indicated that they were of aware of prevalence of deficit thinking and stereotypes regarding Black males in the elementary schools. Deficit thinking caused teachers not to fully embrace the concept that Black male students could attain maximum success. As teachers hold diminished expectations for Black males, Black males are highly impacted by the teacher's perceptions. Smith-Maddox and Solorzano (2002) said that "teachers are seen as conduits through which the ideology and values of the dominant social class are transmitted to students" (p. 69).The implications of such practices could result a variety of negative consequences for Black male students. When Black male students perceive that teachers view them in negative terms, the students may become disillusioned, withdrawn, angered, or frustrated with school and learning. When educators make decisions to limit or restrict access to advance curriculum and engaging instruction, the likelihood of Black male students graduating or pursuing post-secondary options is diminished. In the focus group discussions and in their profiles, some participants shared their personal experiences as children being viewed as inadequate, unwanted as students. The participants communicated how they personally felt as a result. One participant discussed the "heartbreak" he felt after being judged. Another participant discussed "the vibe" he felt not being "wanted." If these adults still recalled the hurt and dejection that they experienced personally as children, one can only imagine how young Black male students may feel or respond when adults deem them inadequate.

Positive and supportive teacher-student relationships may have important role in improving the educational outcomes of Black males in rural schools. The counter stories of the participants provide a glimpse of how Black teachers are able develop relationships with Black male students and maximize their academic outcomes. Their willingness to use care and culturally relevant instructional practices provides space for Black male students to learn content in a manner in which their culture valued, honored and supported. The teachers were willing to invest time into developing these relationships after school with tutoring Black males. Participants discussed how they would go to students' games, performances, church events and even to the students' home to demonstrate support and cultivate relationships. These participants believed their efforts to develop positive and supportive relationships with the students and the parents of the Black male students were critical components to promoting educational success.

Recommendations

Following this critical analysis and reflection upon the literature, the following recommendations are provided to offer direction and guidance to educators as they seek to improve the educational outcomes for Black males in elementary schools.

- 1) Professional training and development opportunities regarding diversity and culturally relevant instruction should be provided to elementary school educators. Teachers, administrators and school staff need to become aware of how Black males in elementary school are impacted by stereotypes and deficit thinking. Many teachers, counselors and administrators may not be aware of how stereotypes and deficit thinking regarding Black male students actively restrict and limit Black male students' educational outcomes. Teachers and administrators may not understand how educators are more likely to discipline Black male students more harshly for infractions that are subjective. Teachers,

counselors and administrators may not be cognizant of how instructional practices that are designed to compensate for assumed academic deficits of Black male students rarely provide the students the opportunity to move out of the lower instructional tracks. Critical Race Theory illuminates how school environments often become racialized where Black students are negatively affected by manifestations of racist beliefs at the institutional and individual level (Reynolds, 2010). Professional development may help bring awareness of racialized practices occurring in elementary schools. Thus, teachers, counselors and administrators may gain valuable knowledge so that they can begin the process of critically examining and revising policies and practices that contribute to negative outcomes for Black male students.

- 2) Administrators and school officials must be willing to critically examine and revise policies and practices that serve to restrict access of Black males to engaging and advanced courses. District policies, school policies and teacher practices need to be reviewed and regularly audited to ensure equitable outcomes. A critical race theory framework may illuminate hidden biases and practices that operate in the name of neutrality. This study revealed that participants believed that Black males were often channeled or guided toward classes and curriculum that served to limit their opportunity for academic achievement and future advancement. Although no participant questioned the need for remediation and special education programs, they did question the tendency of the programs to be overpopulated with Black male students. They also questioned the fact that the instructional practices and curriculum often implemented in such classes may not emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving. They considered the instructional mostly offering rudimentary knowledge and rote skills. Participants believed

that the likelihood of Black male students in such programs to overcome the assumed “deficits” was minimal. Through considering the perceptions of Black teachers, schools may engage teachers and staff in meaningful discussions of practices that may limit educational outcomes for Black males. Accordingly, new insights may be gained by teachers and administrators to facilitate and promote more equitable outcomes for Black male students in elementary schools.

- 3) Elementary school teachers, counselors and administrators need to investigate and adopt practices to promote positive partnerships with the parents of Black male students. Deficit thinking and dominant perspectives regarding appropriate parental involvement may diminish opportunities for educators and parents to maximize collaborative efforts to promote academic growth for Black male students. Educators should work to establish positive relationships with the parents of Black male students. Educators should be willing to develop strategies to make their school environment more inviting and welcoming to parents. Administrators should consider soliciting the input of parents regarding ways to accomplish this task. Parents occupy a critical position to offer valuable information that could help schools become more supportive and responsive to students as well as parents. Through this process, educators may become more aware of potential obstacles that restrict parents from engaging with the school in traditional roles. In addition, parent and teacher collaboration may facilitate the development of new strategies and ideas to maximize the educational outcomes for Black males. When educators are amenable and supportive of working with parents, they may develop effective partnerships to help the students achieve academically, socially, and behaviorally.

- 4) More research is needed to explore the perceptions of Black teachers on the academic achievement of Black males at different grade levels in rural Georgia. This study revealed that Black teachers possess intimate knowledge of the experiences, challenges, and opportunities of Black male students in the elementary school. Through the stories and counter narratives, they shared their personal experiences of dealing with racialized experiences. They also shared how they encouraged, motivated, and advocated for their students. Additional research that solicits the voices of Black teachers at the middle school, high school and post-secondary level can be extremely valuable in gaining an understanding of challenges that Black males face as they go through school. Realizing that Black teachers are in critical position to offer new insights can be an important step to promote academic achievement for Black males.
- 5) School systems should develop strategies to recruit and retain more teachers of color. Black teachers comprise about six percent of the teaching population nationally. The narratives confirmed research that identifies the positive benefits that students receive when there is more equitable racial diversity in teaching staffs. The voices of Black teachers in rural Georgia demonstrated care and advocated for their Black male students. They were familiar with cultural patterns of their students and willing to incorporate that knowledge in their instructional techniques and interactions with Black males. The teachers chose to become educators because they recognize the value and importance of Black students seeing and having teachers that looked like them. In addition, these teachers believe that there is a need for more Black male teachers. The presence of more teachers such as these in rural elementary schools could greatly improve the educational outcomes and life chances for Black males. Additionally, their leadership and influence

could also help their colleagues learn effective ways to advance the academic achievement of Black males.

Conclusions

There are many positive characteristics and attributes regarding education within rural communities. Students, parents and educators often benefit from the family-like values and a sense of community that sometimes is present within rural elementary schools. Educators and parents appreciate the level of communication, interaction and support that may exist within the rural school. Yet, this study also illuminated the presence of challenges in rural elementary schools that may hinder academic outcomes of students, especially Black males. Within rural environments, the lack of exposure and limited availability of educational options and resources often intersect with poverty. As a result, Black male students in rural elementary schools too often must traverse a precarious path in pursuit of optimal academic outcomes. As this study highlighted, there are several structural, institutional, and social factors that serve as roadblocks to Black male students. However, the educators that participated in this study are doing everything that they can to stand in the gap. This study provided a glimpse of the experiences and perceptions of Black elementary school teachers in rural Georgia who consistency work to improve the educational outcomes of Black male students, as well as all students. These teachers did not offer a magic formula or technical solutions for instantaneously improving academic achievement of Black males on standardized tests. Nor, did they offer behavioral interventions that are guaranteed to ensure compliance in all instructional settings. However, by sharing their stories and perceptions, these teachers allowed us see the challenges and opportunities that Black male students face in elementary schools in rural Georgia. These teachers intimately understand the importance and urgency of quality education for Black male students. Because of this

understanding, they were willing to develop positive and supportive relationships not only with their Black male students, but also with the students' families. They were willing to go beyond the walls of their schools to nurture and cultivate relationships. They were willing to go beyond the limitations of the state curriculum and traditional instructional strategies to provide their students with meaningful learning experiences with life applications. In addition, they were willing to devote significant energy to advocate for Black male students and motivate them toward greater achievement. As more educators embrace the pedagogical strategies and commitment to uplift Black male students, as was the case with the participants in this study, we may begin to see the negative narrative of Black male achievement change. To that end, we may see the power of education and, ultimately, the educator to positively impact the lives of Black males.

Concluding Thoughts

Throughout my life, I have been very concerned about the education and, ultimately, the life chances of students, especially Black males. As a Black male who grew up in a rural community and attended rural schools as a student, I have a unique connection to young Black males in rural environments. When I became a teacher and administrator in rural schools, I learned clearly that all educators do not think the same regarding factors that may impact the education of Black males in rural schools. This study provided the space for Black educators to engage in open and honest dialogue regarding factors that impact Black males. By sharing their experiences and perceptions, these teachers not only provided critical insights into Black male achievement, but they illuminated some of the challenges that Black males have to endure on day to day basis in rural schools. As they engaged in dialogue, these Black teachers shared significant counter stories and knowledge that could be powerful in fostering greater

understanding of the lived experiences of Black males. Given the pervasiveness of negative perceptions regarding Black male educational outcomes, I believe it is vital that the stories and the experiences of teachers who have been successful with Black male students be given much greater attention. As the facilitator of the focus discussions, I walked away feeling uplifted and rejuvenated by how the teachers were making a difference in students' lives. The teachers themselves appeared to feel energized and validated as they listened to their peers and supported each other. They seemed to value the opportunity to share their voice with their colleagues. Their willingness to openly share stories that are often silenced or overlooked has the potential to move the dominant narrative regarding Black males away from its emphasis on deficiency toward a more inclusive emphasis on humanity and possibility. As a result of this study, I have learned the importance of listening to the voices of those who are often silenced and marginalized. Immense benefits may be gained when effective educators are provided the space and context to share their thoughts, perceptions and experiences in a supportive and nonthreatening setting. As an educator, I have learned the value of investing in relationships with students. The best education occurs when high quality instruction is complemented by the teacher's sincere commitment to the student's success in and beyond the classroom. As a leader, I have learned that much more work is needed to advance the educational outcomes of Black males. To this end, I will continue to solicit the voices of effective educators of Black male students at every level. Understanding the value of this knowledge, I will use it to advocate for improvement of the educational conditions that impact Black males and ultimately improve their life outcomes.

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APPENDIX A
SUPERINTENDENT LETTER



Georgia Southern University

Department of Leadership, Technology, and Human Development

Superintendent Letter

October 21, 2015

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Marshall Fernando Aker. I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University located in Statesboro, Georgia. I am currently pursuing the EDD in Educational Leadership. To complete my program requirements, I am carrying out a research study. I am writing you to ask your permission to conduct this study with some of the teachers in your school district.

The research study is entitled: A Study of Black Teachers' Perceptions of the Academic Achievement of Black Males in Elementary Schools in Rural Georgia. The purpose of this research is to seek insights regarding the education of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia through exploring the perceptions, experiences, and strategies of Black elementary school teachers.

I am requesting to conduct audio taped focus group interviews with some of the elementary school teachers in your district. There will be no involvement of students. The names of each teacher, school, and school district will be assigned pseudonyms on the transcriptions of the research report.

Thank you for considering my request to conduct the study in your school district. I believe the results will be beneficial to your district and to school districts throughout the state. Please do not hesitate to contact me via telephone (706-474-4643), mail (90 Stoney Point Terrace, Covington, GA, 30014) or email: (ma01647@georgiasouthern.edu).

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Marshall Fernando Aker

APPENDIX B
INTRODUCTION LETTER



Georgia Southern University

Department of Leadership, Technology, and Human Development

Introduction Letter

Hello, my name is Fernando Aker. I am a doctoral student working under the direction of Dr. Brenda Marina at Georgia Southern University. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, I am conducting a research study entitled: A Study of Black Teachers' Perceptions of the Academic Achievement of Black Males in Elementary Schools in Rural Georgia.

The purpose of my research study is to explore the perceptions, experiences and practices of Black elementary school teachers who have been successful in developing positive relationships with Black male students and promoting their academic achievement. Through engaging Black elementary school teachers in a focus group discussion, I hope to identify significant factors that they perceive as impacting the educational achievement of Black males. Ultimately, a major goal of this study is to identify what the teacher participants perceive as necessary in improving academic achievement and educational outcomes for Black males.

I am writing you because you have been identified as a teacher who has been successful in promoting high academic achievement and establishing positive relationships with Black male students. Therefore, I am asking you to consider participating in my study.

If you are a Black teacher with at least one year of experience working in an elementary school, you are invited to participate in this research study. The focus group discussion will be scheduled at convenient time and location for the participants. During the discussion, participants will be asked questions that will allow them to share their experiences and perceptions regarding the achievement of Black male students. The discussion may take 90 minutes to two hours.

I will serve as the moderator during the focus group discussion by asking the participants open-ended questions. However, as a participant, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. In addition, you may withdraw or decline participation at any time.

Although your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and not required, I do hope you consider participating. I believe that participants in this study may provide valuable knowledge and insightful stories to help illuminate the challenges and opportunities for Black male students.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please notify me by email at Fernando_aker@putnam.k12.ga.us. Again, your participation in this study is strictly voluntary; however, I hope you will agree to participate because I believe your perspective can be very beneficial in improving the educational and life chances of Black male students.

Please feel free to email me with any questions you may have. Thank you for your attention and response regarding this request.

Sincerely,

Fernando Aker

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT



Georgia Southern University

Department of Leadership, Technology, and Human Development

Dear Teacher:

My name is Marshall Fernando Aker. I am a doctoral student working under the direction of Dr. Brenda Marina at Georgia Southern University. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, I am conducting a research study entitled: *A Study of Black Teachers' Perceptions of the Academic Achievement of Black Males in Elementary Schools in Rural Georgia*.

The purpose of this research is to explore Black teachers' perceptions, experiences and ideas regarding the education of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia. Through engaging Black elementary school teachers in a focus group discussion, this study seeks to identify significant factors that Black teachers perceive as impacting the educational achievement of Black males. Ultimately, a major goal of the study is to identify what Black teachers perceive as necessary in improving academic achievement and educational outcomes for Black males.

If you are a Black teacher with at least one year of experience at your current elementary school, you are invited to participate in this research study. Although your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and not required, I do hope you consider participating. Participants in this research study will discuss the academic achievement of Black males in rural Georgia in focus group discussion with other Black teachers. I will serve as the moderator during the discussion by asking the participants open-ended questions. Participants will be encouraged to share their thoughts. However, as a participant, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. In addition, you may withdraw or decline participation at any time. The focus group discussion may take between 90 minutes to two hours. I will use an iPad to digitally audiotape the focus group discussion. As the focus group session occurs, I will also take notes to capture significant moments and points of emphasis during the discussion. Additional questions may be asked when appropriate to clarify understanding as needed. Careful attention will be given to promote security of the research and confidentiality of research participants. The following steps will be taken to protect the participants' confidentiality. 1) Access to the digital audio files from the focus group discussion will be password protected with a secure passcode. 2) The digital recording device (iPad) will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. 3) Pseudonyms will be assigned for each participant in the study as well as the schools and school districts. Participants will not be identified by name in subsequent documents or transcriptions. 3) Focus group transcriptions, notes and subsequent documents will be secured on the researcher's personal computer with password protection to prevent unauthorized users. 4) Audio files, notes and transcriptions will be destroyed after three years.

This study does not present any greater psychological, emotional, or physical risks beyond the normal risks experienced by educators in their daily routine.

There is no direct benefit to you for your participation in the study. However, we hope that information obtained from the study may provide valuable knowledge that can be used by educators and stakeholders to positively impact the lives of Black male students.

If you have questions about this study, please contact me (Fernando Aker) at 706-474-4643. You may also contact Dr. Brenda Marina, Dissertation Committee chairperson at 912-478-5600. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843.

Your consent to participate in this research is strictly voluntary and you may decline to participate, refuse to answer any question(s), or withdraw anytime during the study without penalty or retribution. Please note that your signature will serve as your consent to participate in this study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number **H16000**.

Title of Project: A STUDY OF BLACK TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN RURAL GEORGIA

Principal Investigator: Marshall Fernando Aker, 90 Stoney Point Terrace, Covington, GA 30014, 706-474-4643, Fernando_aker@putnam.k12.ga.us

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Brenda Marina, Georgia Southern University, Department of Leadership, Technology, and Human Development, P.O. Box 8131, Statesboro, GA 30460, 912-478-0510, bmarina@georgiasouthern.edu

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group Questions

The following questions will be used to facilitate discussion in the focus group

1. How does attending school in a rural environment impact Black males at your school?
2. How do discipline policies/practices impact Black males in your school?
3. How do academic policies/practices impact Black males in your school?
4. Are there any other school policies/practices that impact learning opportunities for Black males at your school?
5. Is a teacher's race important to teaching and educating Black male students?
6. Does the make-up of the current teaching force affect Black male students in your school?
7. In elementary school, do Black boys learn anything about how they are valued in school and what is expected of them in the future?
8. Do you have specific teaching strategies for Black males? Do you feel that these strategies are effective?
9. What do feel is most important to promote Black male academic achievement?
10. What messages do you believe Black males need to receive to promote their academic success?

APPENDIX E
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs | | |
| Institutional Review Board (IRB) | | |
| Phone: 912-478-0843 | | Veazey Hall 2021 |
| | | P.O. Box 8005 |
| Fax: 912-478-0719 | IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu | Statesboro, GA 30460 |

To: Marshall Fernando Aker

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Initial Approval Date: 09/08/2015

Expiration Date: 08/31/2016

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research
Expedited

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H16000** and titled "**A Study of Black Teachers' Perceptions of the Academic Achievement of Black Males in Elementary Schools in Rural Georgia**" it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of 16 subjects.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research. Description: This study seeks to examine the perspective of Black teachers regarding the academic achievement of Black males in elementary schools in rural Georgia.

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,


Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX F
PARTICIPANT PROFILE DOCUMENT

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

This study seeks to explore the experiences, voices, and perspectives of Black teachers to illuminate the challenges and opportunities regarding the education of Black males. As a part of the study, participants' demographic data may be needed to help interpret information gained during this study. This demographic profile is included to help ascertain information that may not be revealed in the focus group discussion. Participants are asked to complete and return this form.

1. Name:
2. Preferred Pseudonym:
3. Age:
4. Number of Years Teaching: Grade(s): Subject(s)
5. Where did you attend elementary, middle, high school and college?
6. Did you receive any special awards or recognitions while in high school or college?
7. What organizations were you involved in during high school or college?
8. What extracurricular activities were you involved in during high school or college?
9. Describe your family's socioeconomic status when you were growing up:

Wealthy Upper-middle class Middle class Lower-Middle class Poor Very Poor

Personal Autobiographic Information

- Please discuss any significant events/experiences that you had during your schooling years that impacted your development and perspectives on education.

- Discuss any of your teachers that you had while in school and how their expectations, attitudes or actions impacted you.

- Please discuss why you decided to become a teacher.

- Discuss what you feel are significant factors impacting the education of Black male students.

- Discuss strategies/techniques that you may use with Black boys.